5-8-2024

U.S. Female Military Spouses' Experiences of Careers and Self-Esteem After Frequent Military Relocations

Jennifer Lynn Gonzalez
Walden University

Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Jennifer L. Gonzalez

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Barbara Benoliel, Committee Chairperson,
Human and Social Services Faculty

Dr. Jeffrey Harlow, Committee Member,
Human and Social Services Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2024

Abstract

U.S. Female Military Spouses' Experiences of Careers and Self-Esteem After Frequent Military Relocations

by

Jennifer L. Gonzalez

MSW, Loyola University, 2007

BA, DePaul University, 2003

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human & Social Services – Military Families & Culture

Walden University

May 2024

Abstract

U.S. female military spouses experience a number of challenges in sustaining their personal employment, career development, and career progression due to frequent military relocations. Previous studies have revealed that sustained employment provides individuals with a sense of purpose and identity, which significantly impacts overall well-being. The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore experiences of U.S. female military spouses seeking employment after multiple relocations due to military reassignments and their perceived self-esteem post relocation. Self-determination theory provided the theoretical framework for this study. A generic qualitative approach and data from 13 participants' individual interviews were collected and analyzed with content analysis for this study. Findings from this study support prior research stating that relocation moves do impact spouses' employment opportunities and progression, that not all moves are the same, and military spouses' self-esteem is negatively impacted by unemployment and/or underemployment. This study has made a unique qualitative contribution to positive social change and the literature regarding this phenomenon and results presented inform administrators of the need for programs and resources that support U.S. female military spouses in obtaining employment after military relocations.

U.S. Female Military Spouses' Experiences of Careers and Self-Esteem After Frequent Military Relocations

by

Jennifer L. Gonzalez

MSW, Loyola University, 2007

BA, DePaul University, 2003

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human & Social Services – Military Families & Culture

Walden University

May 2024

Dedication

I dedicate this research to the countless men and women in all service branches of the military. Thank you for your unsung heroism and continued diligence in keeping the American population, overseas, and stateside safe. Your courage and sacrifice is not in vain and many of us are here to support you as well as your family and loved ones.

Acknowledgments

I thank God for giving me the strength and courage to keep moving forward even in times of question. You continuously show me the path and guide me to a better future not only for myself but for my family and community. Thank you for giving me this gift of opportunity to share something of me with others.

I thank my family, especially my mom, Angelita, my husband, Isidro, and my three children, Noel, Arbella, and Angelina. Thank you, mom, for instilling solid values and beliefs in me and encouraging me to progress. Thank you, Isidro, for continuing to challenge me and validate reasons why we started on this endeavor. Thank you to my children who show me every day that knowledge is never-ending, is exciting, is fun, and is powerful. You three are my light and beacon, especially in times of darkness.

Also, thank you to the faculty at Walden University for your guidance and support, especially to my Chair, Dr. Benoliel, second committee member, Dr. Harlow, and mentor, Dr. Bright. Without your assistance and continued encouragement, this would not have been possible.

Finally, thank you to my peers whom I call friends. It does take a village to help raise one's spirit and support, and my village was you all. From helping me brainstorm topics (Mr. Danzo) to offering me words of encouragement, I appreciate and thank you all.

Table of Contents

List of Tables v

List of Figures vi

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study 1

Background 1

Problem Statement 3

Purpose of the Study 4

Research Question 5

Theoretical Framework for the Study 5

Nature of the Study 7

Definitions 9

Assumptions 10

Scope and Delimitations 11

Limitations 11

Significance 13

Summary 14

Chapter 2: Literature Review 15

Literature Search Strategy 16

Theoretical Foundation: Self-Determination Theory (SDT) 17

The Origination of SDT 17

The Three Basic Needs of SDT: Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness 19

SDT, External Forces, and Well-being 21

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts....22
Trailing Spouses....23
Military Service Members and Spouses....25
Military Spouse Relocation and Well-being....26
Negative Impacts of Military Relocation for Military Spouses....28
Support Programs for Military Spouses....36
Summary and Conclusion....41
Chapter 3: Research Method....42
Research Design and Rationale....42
Role of the Researcher....44
Methodology....46
Participant Selection Logic....46
Instrumentation....48
Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection....49
Data Analysis Plan....50
Issues of Trustworthiness....51
Credibility....51
Transferability....52
Dependability....53
Confirmability....53
Ethical Procedures....53
Summary....55

Chapter 4: Results 57
Setting 57
Demographics 57
Data Collection 58
Data Analysis 59
Evidence of Trustworthiness 71
Credibility 71
Transferability 71
Dependability 72
Confirmability 72
Results 72
SDT: Competence 73
SDT: Relatedness 74
SDT: Autonomy 75
Employment Status 75
Other Challenges 76
Perceived Self-Esteem Post Relocation 77
Discrepant cases 78
Summary 80
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations 82
Interpretation of the Findings 82
Not All PCS Moves are the Same 82

It is Hard Finding Employment Post Relocation 83

Using SDT to Explain How Loss of Employment Affects Military Spouses in Terms of the Three Basic Psychological Needs 84

Perceived Self-Esteem Post Relocation 85

Limitations of the Study 86

Recommendations 87

Implications for Social Change 88

Conclusion 88

References 91

Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer 106

Appendix B: Criteria Form 107

Appendix C: Interview Protocol 108

Appendix D: Debrief Discussion Post-Interview 110

List of Tables

Table 1 2020 Demographic Profile of the United States Military Community: Active-Duty Families (DoD Demographics Report) 26

Table 2 Participant Demographics 58

Table 3 Relocations & Experience 62

Table 4 Employment & Program Experience 64

Table 5 Positives and Negatives of SDT: Competence, Relatedness, Autonomy 66

Table 6 SDT: Internal and External Motivation 67

Table 7 Positive and Negative Responses Regarding Self-esteem 69

Table 8 Pay and Other Various Challenges that Participants Faced Post Relocation 70

List of Figures

Figure 1 Components of SDT 19

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

This study investigated the experiences of U.S. female military spouses seeking employment after multiple military relocations and their self-esteem. Past research has taken a quantitative approach on how relocation affects a military spouse's earnings from employment. Also, most of the research previously conducted has been overseas in the UK and other parts of Europe. Research conducted on the general population in the United States has also shed light on the positive affects to being employed beyond the minimal financial stability, like having a sense of purpose and identity (Gribble & Goodwin et al., 2019) or overall better quality of life (Trewick & Muller, 2014) which positively impacts self-esteem (Alka & Midha, 2015).

The military has spent a significant number of resources, both financial and manpower, to implement programs to assist and support dependent spouses with finding employment. The hope of this study is to first contribute to the literature regarding this phenomenon of female U.S. military spouses' experiences seeking employment post military relocations. Secondly, this study will explore U.S. female military spouses' view of their own self-esteem after their experiences in seeking employment post military relocations. Findings from this study can be used to better serve the needs of this population.

Background

The term "trailing spouse" has been used in past research to describe a spouse who follows their significant other and makes professional sacrifices to assist the other in fulfilling their professional goals (Cangia, 2018). Researchers have claimed that in

making such sacrifices, this type of lifestyle creates a constant state of flux or unstable environment for the trailing spouse (Biglia & Marti, 2014). Female military spouses fit the term "trailing spouse" due to the various sacrifices they make to follow their significant other and share the unique lifestyle that creates a state of continued instability.

U.S. female military spouses experience a number of challenges in sustaining their personal employment, career development, and career progression due to frequent military relocations (McBride & Cleymans, 2014; Wang & Pullman, 2019). A seminal study by Burrell et al. (2006) surveyed 346 military spouses residing overseas and found a direct correlation between geographic mobility, lower psychological well-being, physical health, lower marital happiness, and lower retention in the military. This study also found that differences in culture, language, and living conditions contributed to lower satisfaction and well-being among military spouses. Lack of employment or underemployment resulted in decreased feelings of self-worth, feeling loss of professional role or identity, and feeling subpar contribution to the family (Elliott, 2019).

The well-being of military spouses and families represents an integral component in making sure that military personnel are mission ready during peacetime and in combat (Huffman et al., 2019). Previous studies have revealed that sustained employment provides individuals with a sense of purpose and identity, which significantly impacts overall well-being. Employment may be one of the many factors in making sure military spouses have a sense of overall well-being, and in-turn sustain a healthier and reliable military unit (Gribble et al., 2019).

Problem Statement

Research studies show that employment among military spouses provides the spouses with structure, sense of purpose, status within a community, and social connections outside of the military (Gribble et al., 2019). Trewick and Muller (2014) surveyed 289 Australian military spouses and found that employment and income were significantly correlated with higher levels of psychological well-being and higher levels of self-reported quality of life. However, the positive effects of employment may be overshadowed by frequent relocations and little notice to sufficiently plan for childcare and housing because of those relocations. As a result of frequent relocations spouses of active duty service members may in turn experience a number of challenges in sustaining their employment, career development, and progression (McBride & Cleymans, 2014; Wang & Pullman, 2019).

Results from a longitudinal study found frequent military relocations negatively impact the income of female military spouses (Meadows et al., 2016). This study also revealed that female military spouses worked fifteen hours less per week and earned approximately $17,000 less than their female civilian counterparts. A survey of military spouses of active duty members revealed that 22% of military spouses were unemployed and actively seeking work (Office of People Analytics, 2020). Burke and Miller (2018) stated that the pay reduction and termination of earnings because of a military relocation can impact the spouse for up to three years after a move.

Alka and Midha (2015) found that employment and education impacts a female's level of confidence and self-esteem, which in-turn promotes a positive and balanced well-

being. Frequent relocations disrupt a spouse's sense of self and sometimes results in a loss of personal identity (Cangia, 2017). Employment is a problem for this population because the sense of purpose and identity from employment significantly impacts a person's overall well-being (Gribble et al., 2019). The focus of this study is on female military spouses since 92% of spouses across all branches of military service are female (The Council of Economic Advisers, 2018).

Although the aforementioned research regarding the experiences that female military spouses seeking employment after frequent moves illuminates important findings, I did not locate any qualitative research that has examined how US female military spouses perceive their own self-esteem post relocation, which may be a concern for their career success after all these relocations. Further research is necessary to explore U.S. female military spouses' self-esteem post relocation due to military reassignments. The gap in literature that is covered in this research was more in-depth exploration of U.S. female military spouses' perceptions of themselves after their experiences in seeking employment post military relocation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore the experiences of U.S. female military spouses seeking employment after military relocation and their self-esteem. Findings from a quantitative study conducted by Trewick and Muller (2014) revealed that employed military spouses had higher ratings of positive physical and psychological well-being when compared to unemployed spouses. The researchers found that financial income and status were key indicators of the participants' overall quality of

life (Trewick & Muller, 2014). Alka and Midha (2015) also reported that employment affects financial stability, and overall well-being, promotes better coping, as well as enhances physical and psychological health. Many of the studies I located during my literature review that addressed the topic of employment and outcomes for U.S. military spouses took a quantitative approach. Additional qualitative research is needed to examine military spouses perceived self-esteem after experiences of seeking employment after relocation due to military reassignments.

Research Question

Results from this generic qualitative study was used to answer the question: What are the experiences of U.S. female military spouses seeking employment after relocation due to military reassignments and their perceived self-esteem post relocation?

Theoretical Framework for the Study

The theoretical framework used for this study was self-determination theory (SDT), which is the study of human motivation and personality. SDT originated from the work of psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan who first introduced their theory of motivation in their 1985 book 'Self-Determination and Intrinsic Motivation in Human Behavior'. SDT suggests that people are motivated not solely by extrinsic motivation or external rewards, but also by intrinsic or internal sources (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The study of motivation is not a new concept. For example, in 1957, Reinforcement theory of motivation was proposed by Burrhus Frederic Skinner which stated that human motivation is influenced by the external environment, whether positive or negative. This way of thinking focused on the ability to control people's behavior

through reward and punishment systems. SDT not only focuses on external influences but also looks at internal influences like pleasure, interest, enjoyment, or finding value and worth in what is being accomplished (Ryan, 2020).

SDT theorizes that there are three psychological needs that are essential to the growth and integrity of each person. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), the following three psychological factors are: competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Competence: Becoming proficient and learning new skills. Feeling effective and capable in activities engaged in life. Experiencing growth and extending one's abilities. Relatedness: Having relationships with others. Feeling connected and belonging in their atmosphere. Feeling like one matter and having a sense of being cared for and contributing in social groups. Autonomy: Feeling in control of one's behavior and goals. Self-organizers of one's action.

The three components of SDT, competence, relatedness, and autonomy can be used to explain how changes in employment for female military spouses could adversely affect their overall sense of well-being. According to Monteiro et al. (2021), to understand a person's sense of well-being is to know their sense of self-esteem. Self-esteem can either positively correlate with well-being or negatively correlate with well-being. Depending on one's level of self-esteem can impact one's competence, relatedness, and autonomy when measuring satisfaction of one's work or life.

Findings from previous research has revealed that employment can provide individuals with a sense of identity, sense of security, and feeling of stability, purpose, structure, social support, and financial income (Gribble et al., 2019; Trewick et al., 2014).

Loss of latent benefits (i.e., structure, purpose, social interaction, status, and activity) have been shown to increase distress levels. Loss of financial stability resulting in difficulties planning for the future coupled with the former have been theorized to negatively affect psychological well-being (Trewick et al., 2014).

Some military families relocate every 2 to 3 years, which may make it challenging for military spouses to secure meaningful employment. This frequent relocation may make it challenging for military spouses to become proficient in their professional skills, which may impede the spouses' sense of competence in the workforce. A military spouse's sense of autonomy or control over their own actions and decisions may be impacted due to postponing personal and professional goals because of frequent relocations. Forming relationships in personal and professional settings and being able to relate with others may become difficult for military spouses because the time spent in one location may not be long enough to form strong bonds with others.

Nature of the Study

A generic qualitative inquiry approach was utilized to conduct this study. The generic qualitative approach is exploratory in nature, and is frequently used to investigate the opinions, attitudes, and beliefs regarding the experiences of the population being studied (Percy et al., 2015). The generic qualitative approach is appropriate for this proposed study because the goals of the methodology are aligned with the purpose of this proposed research, which is to explore experiences of U.S. female military spouse's seeing employment after relocation due to military reassignments and their perceived self-esteem post relocation.

Participants were recruited using purposeful and snowball sampling concurrently. Purposeful sampling means to specifically select participants who have knowledge about the phenomenon being studied (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Patton, 2002). The specific population that was researched in this study are U.S. female military spouses. Snowball sampling was conducted to assist with generating future participants by asking current participants for potential recruits. Sometimes this form of sampling is employed when researchers are trying to investigate 'hidden' or hard-to-reach groups (Noy, 2008). Both of these types of sampling techniques are appropriate for this study due to the specialized group that will be investigated. The goal of this study was to interview a sample size of 12 U.S. female military spouses. The participants must be currently married to U.S. active duty service members and must have completed a minimum of one PCS move prior to the interview.

A 2019 survey of 605,716 military spouses of U.S. active duty service members indicated that 81% had experienced at least one PCS move during their active duty spouse's military career, 33% within the last 12 months. According to the data collected, 35% of these military spouses stated it took them at least 7 months or more to find employment after their PCS move. The research conducted from this survey suggested that a PCS move more than doubles the likelihood that the military spouse will be unemployed at their next location (Office of People Analytics, 2019).

A small sample size is recommended for this type of study because the goal of this research is to acquire in-depth data. Sample sizes that are too large would make it challenging to analyze data from participants. Also, researchers have proposed that data

saturation in qualitative research can be obtained in as few as 12 in-depth interviews (Boddy, 2016). Twelve semi-structured interviews will be conducted via Zoom/Facetime platform.

Definitions

Key concepts that will be explored in this generic qualitative study are the following:

Active duty: Full-time duty in the United States military service (Schading, 2007).

Military relocation or permanent change of station (PCS): Relocates the active duty service member's work affiliation from one duty station or unit to another based on the needs of the branch of service. The service member usually has their family accompany them on the move (Blaisure et al., 2016).

Military spouse: Spouse of a service member who is enrolled in the Defense Enrollment and Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS; a system that verifies dependents that qualify for military-based services and benefits) and is deemed a legal dependent of the service member (Blaisure et al., 2016).

Trailing spouse: A spouse who follows their significant other and makes professional sacrifices to assist the other and/or their family (Cangia, 2017).

Well-being: Self measurement on how an individual feels (life satisfaction, positive affect or lack of negative affect) along with how that individual is functioning (Martela & Sheldon, 2019).

Self-esteem – one's perception of their own self-worth (Du et al., 2017).

Assumptions

One main assumption of this study was that all participants had or currently are looking for employment after a military relocation and want to be employed. Although previous research suggests that employment provides better outcomes of psychological well-being, other role identities may also provide the same outcome (i.e., role as wife and/or mother).

Another assumption was that all participants are eager to participate in this study with no bias or hidden agendas associated to their participation. Prior to recruitment for this study, the participant was informed that participation in this study would not increase chances of obtaining employment nor would the researcher be able to assist the participant in finding employment.

As a researcher, my main assumption was that generic qualitative approach is the best method for this type of study. Historically, there has been much debate regarding scientific backing of qualitative versus quantitative research methods. For this type of study, qualitative was chosen as the preferred method of research due to wanting a closer, more detailed, and in depth investigation into this phenomenon of U.S. female military spouses' experiences of seeking employment after a military relocation and their perceived self-esteem post relocation.

Interpretive framework or set of beliefs and feelings of how the world works and should be studied can vary by researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The assumption that the interpretation that I will provide for data collected is accurate and without bias. This assumption can also be considered a limitation because of my personal knowledge of

being a U.S. female military spouse. Other factors that can affect the analysis of data are researcher culture, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and educational background.

Scope and Delimitations

In this study, I focused on U.S. female military spouses' experiences with seeking employment after a military relocation and their perceptions related to overall well-being. I did not address the experiences of male military spouses. Also, I did not address the experiences of Veterans or spouses of Veterans. This focus narrows the scope of what is being researched and may be an issue regarding transferability.

In research, transferability means the degree to which the research study's findings can be transferred or be applicable to other contexts, situations, and other populations. Transferability is the equivalent to generalizability (Anney, 2014). Since this study focuses on a specific gender, other researchers can argue that the findings will not be gender neutral. Also, because the population being studied is only spouses of active duty service members, findings may not be transferable to veterans or their spouses.

Limitations

The focus of this research was only conducted on U.S. female military spouses. Since the focus was on one specific gender, this limits the study and excludes male military spouses. Also, this study focuses only on U.S. spouses who are married to active duty service members, which excludes spouses outside of the U.S. and spouses of Veterans who are no longer on active duty status. Another potential limitation is the type of participant that may be attracted to participate in the study due to the method of recruitment. Recruitment for this study was using social media (i.e., Facebook, Twitter,

LinkedIn) and word-of-mouth (i.e., FRG, friends, family, networking) via snowball sampling. These forms of recruitment may have limited the participants to a certain age group, race, nationality, and culture due to their beliefs, experiences, and knowledge and comfort in using social media. These limitations may affect the transferability of the results.

Also, potential researcher bias may have been a limitation to this study, since I am also a female military spouse and have prior working knowledge of the topic being researched. To limit researcher bias, I utilized reflective journaling and bracketing to closely monitor my own opinions. Reflective journaling and bracketing in research are used to keep track and examine the researchers' own personal beliefs, assumptions, and predisposition or preconceptions throughout the research process (Ortlipp, 2008; Sorsa et al., 2015). It is used to keep the researcher aware of any personal bias that may arise and instead have an open mind regarding the phenomenon being researched, without influencing the participant in any way. This method helps to assist the researcher separate any personal assumptions from what is being observed during the research process (Baksh, 2018).

Throughout this study, I utilized reflective journaling and bracketing along with assistance from peers who have no personal knowledge of the subject matter. Journaling and bracketing helped me continuously reflect on any personal biases and assumptions I may bring to the study as a female military spouse. Use of peers at Walden University that I have previously met through residencies, assisted with reviewing my interpretation of data that was collected. This ensured that personal bias did not bleed into any

conclusions drawn, and as a researcher, I am understanding the phenomenon through the eyes and experience of my participants and not my own. Also, to decrease any bias or influence I may have on a participant, I made sure I did not select any participants who I am acquainted with on a personal or professional level.

Significance

This research has made a unique contribution to the literature regarding U.S. female military spouses' experiences of seeking employment after a military relocation and their perceived self-esteem post relocation. Results from this study presents information that substantiates the need for programs and resources that support U.S. female military spouses in obtaining employment after military relocations based off of feedback from participants.

Key stakeholders such as social workers, family therapists, employment specialists, Military OneSource, human services providers, and other entities that provide support to military spouses and families could use information from this study to advocate for policies and processes to increase employment opportunities for military spouses. Military programs and their affiliates are not only hiring Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW) but they are also hiring Licensed Professional Counselors (LPC) and other Masters level human service providers to assist with supporting this population. Collaborative efforts by existing programs and organizations can be facilitated through the common goal of assisting military spouses with the use of these findings, especially since there is a gap in current research on this particular population.

Any findings can help contribute to the work of human service providers in promoting the overall well-being for U.S. female military spouses because previous researchers have found a positive correlation between employment and physical and psychological well-being. This research can contribute to positive social change by generating discussions and recommendations among key stakeholders regarding the need to develop policies, procedures, and programs to support military spouses in obtaining employment after family relocation due to military permanent change of station, with the hope of improving and encouraging positive self-esteem.

Summary

This chapter identified and briefly discussed the research problem and gap in literature. This generic qualitative study explored the experiences of US female military spouses seeking employment after military relocation and their self-esteem. Also, the theoretical foundation of the study was identified, which is self-determination theory. Definition of key concepts that will be utilized throughout this study was defined. Assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations of the study were identified along with the significance of the study.

In Chapter 2, an in-depth literature review of effects of military relocation on U.S. female military spouses on employment and well-being is presented. Also, a review of literature analyzing the theoretical foundation and application of self-determination theory to the research study is provided.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

There are many positive benefits that employment can provide for military spouses. Previous researchers have revealed that employment for military spouses provides structure, a sense of purpose, status within a community, and social connections outside of the military (Gribble et al., 2019). Additionally, employment and earning income have been found to be related to higher levels of psychological well-being and higher levels of self-reported quality of life (Trewick et al., 2014). Due to these positive influences, the U.S. government has made attempts to address employment issues through programs geared towards military spouses. However, because of frequent relocations and little notice to sufficiently plan for employment, childcare, and housing, spouses of active-duty members may experience significant challenges in sustaining their personal employment, career development, and career progression (McBride & Cleymans, 2014; Wang & Pullman, 2019). As such, this generic qualitative study will explore military spouses' experiences of seeking employment after a military relocation and perception of their self-esteem post move.

In this chapter, I first cover my literature search strategy and then provide an examination of the theoretical framework of self-determination theory including research findings of other researchers who have used this theory in the past. I then discuss research related to the effects of military relocation on spousal employment. I begin with a discussion of the general topic of trailing spouses because military spouses are a subcategory of trailing spouses. I then discuss existing research specific to military spouses and the negative effects of relocation on military spouses. Last, I provide a brief

overview of current employment programs provided for military spouses to give background knowledge of what services are currently offered for this population. I close with a discussion of the gap in the literature and then summarize the chapter.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted through the Walden University Library online databases. The search engines that I used for the literature review were Academic Search Complete, Military and Government Collection, PsycInfo, PsycArticles, SocIndex with full text, and Social Work Abstracts. Google Scholar was a secondary database search engine that I used as a secondary means of finding academic journal articles related to my subject and interest. The following keywords and phrases were used in the databases: *military spouses, employment, military dependents, families of military personnel, career development, military wife, <or> military wives, military families, jobs, work, career, female spouse, females, women, military, identity, occupation, spouse, mother, self-worth, quality, obstacles, barrier, challenges, profession, experiences, perceptions, identity formation, education <and> challenges, development, self-determination theory, workplace, self-determination, well-being, psychological well-being, well-being family relationships, expat wife stigma, relocation, family unit, physical well-being, career progression, promotion, career advancement, amotivation, motivation, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, gender, transition, move, self-esteem,* and *well-being mental health*. Boolean connectors were used during this search to combine various key words in order to hone research results. Also, I initially focused on articles that had been published within 5 years (2016-2021) of my first drafting of the proposal, however

older literature was also reviewed for better depth and knowledge of the subject being researched. Further, I researched the literature for 2022-2023 to ensure I covered new publications as I revised my review.

Theoretical Foundation: Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

SDT is the theoretical framework used for this study. I used SDT because it will help guide my study on how U.S. female military spouses perceive their experiences of seeking employment after a military relocation and how this may affect their overall well-being. In this section, I cover the creation of SDT and define the core components of SDT which are autonomy, competence, and relatedness. I then discuss how well-being is developed and influenced in relation to SDT.

The Origination of SDT

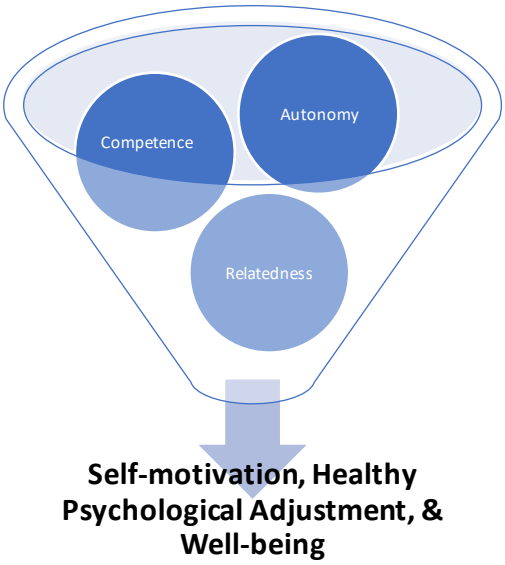
SDT was initially introduced by Deci and Ryan in 1985 through a book they wrote titled *Self-Determination and Intrinsic Motivation in Human Behavior*. Before the introduction of SDT, a behaviorist approach was generally accepted as the means for explaining human motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2001). As such, theorists either believed external social environmental factors or internal psychological factors motivated psychological growth and need fulfillment of individuals (Ryan & Deci, 2004). SDT was developed to combine both external and internal explanations, and to introduce the idea that the self's primary task is to assimilate, coordinate, and regulate from both internal and external environmental factors (Ryan, 2020). Thus, SDT provides a broader theoretical framework that can be applied to various programs of study outside the field

of psychology due to its focus on external and internal forces (Ryan & Deci, 2019) and has been used in studies of human motivation and personality (Gagne & Deci, 2005).

The basis of SDT is the desire to achieve high levels of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Locke & Schattke, 2019). SDT defines needs as the nutrients for growth (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Specifically, SDT suggests that the attainment of the three psychological needs can lead to three internal psychological factors: self-motivation, healthy psychological adjustment, and well-being (see Figure 1; Coxen et al., 2021; Ryan, 2020). However, SDT theorists also assert that individuals are impacted by various external forces that can help or hinder their attainment of the three basic needs (Clark et al., 2013). Therefore, SDT theorists believe it is important for individuals to have balance in all three psychological factors; an imbalance may result in an individuals' poor overall well-being due to unmet basic needs (Church et al., 2012).

Figure 1

Components of SDT



Note: Above shows the interactions of the three SDT components leading to the three psychological factors

The Three Basic Needs of SDT: Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness

Autonomy refers to the ability to freely make personal choices and for an individual to have control over their actions (Deci et al., 1985). Individuals who have a perception of having ownership over what they are attempting to do or accomplish, via their own choice, are said to have autonomy (Averill et al., 2020; Coxen et al., 2021; Fradkin-Hayslip, 2021). Therefore, inherent in the concept of autonomy is an individual's self-endorsement of their own actions (Ryan & La Guardia, 2000).

Competence refers to the level of skill or proficiency that the individual has to complete a task (Deci & Ryan, 2000). When a person is competent, the individual has gained mastery over a particular task and can perform that task confidently (Coxen et al., 2021). Also, in combination with the construct of autonomy, competence also relates to

the drive to learn and become proficient in new skills because believing one has competence can result in an individual feeling capable of engaging in meaningful activities (Averill & Major, 2020). Thus, when an individual believes they are competent in their abilities to be successful and efficient in their environment, the individual is motivated to work towards completing their goals (Averill & Major, 2020).

The component of relatedness refers to an individual making connections with other people and feeling like they belong to a group and, further, are important to that group (Deci et al., 1985). According to SDT, relatedness should not be underestimated because people have an innate need to have relationships with others to experience a sense of belonging (Ryan et al., 2000). Therefore, relatedness also provides a sense of being cared for and contributing to social groups and to feel important, valued, and loved (Ryan & La Guardia, 2000).

All three needs must be met for a person to achieve and maintain psychological health, mental health, and overall well-being. If any one or all three basic needs are neglected or hindered in any way, a sense of loss or purpose and decreased well-being may emerge. Therefore, fulfilling one's competence, relatedness, and autonomy must occur on an ongoing basis throughout an individual's lifespan to experience well-being and constant growth. Otherwise, an individual will feel decreased happiness and feelings of loss or fulfillment (Ryan & La Guardia, 2000). Research indicates that these needs are universal and do not belong to one culture, race, or ethnicity (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

SDT, External Forces, and Well-being

According to SDT, an individual's ability to reach high levels of the three components of autonomy, competence, and relatedness is what contributes to well-being (Fradkin-Hayslip, 2021). However, various external forces have been found to impact an individual's odds in attaining these three components. For example, research has shown that the external forces of family relationships and employment influence an individual's achievement of the three components.

Quality time and positive interaction with family may satisfy an individual's psychological needs. For example, Lin et al., (2021) found that when an individual can decide what activity(s) to engage in with their family, their sense of autonomy grows. Also, when clear expectations are set in the household or when an individual can meet the request of another family member, an individual can feel a sense of competence when accomplishing the request and fulfilling mastery over their environment. Furthermore, when family members share positive interactions, spend enjoyable time together, and have open communication this satisfies the need for relatedness (Lin et al., 2021). Thus, a family structure that supports the fulfillment of the three basic needs, leads to an increase in three psychological factors of self-motivation, healthy psychological adjustment, and well-being.

Employment status is also linked to well-being and SDT has been used to explain the effects of job insecurity on an individual's three basic psychological needs. For example, when individuals feel high levels of job insecurity, there is a sense of reduced autonomy over their job resulting in feelings of helplessness (Shin et al., 2019). However,

if job stability and satisfaction are present, then fewer health problems and an increase in well-being have been reported (Gomez-Baya & Lucia-Casademunt, 2018). The financial insecurity felt by individuals who have insecure employment has been linked to depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues (Weinstein & Stone, 2018). Additionally, employment can provide not only identity but also purpose (Hadden & Smith, 2017), both of which positively impact the three basic needs identified by SDT.

As such, SDT is an appropriate theoretical framework for this research because findings from this study may provide information on how the loss of employment affects individuals in terms of the three basic psychological needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy and how they relate to well-being. My interview questions and analysis of data will be based on the fundamentals of SDT. The interview questions will be initially deductively categorized and coded by the three basic psychological needs. Finally results from this study will be interpreted with the lens of SDT to provide clarity and answers to my stated research question: What are the experiences of U.S. female military spouses seeking employment after a military relocation due to military reassignments and their perceived self-esteem post relocation?

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

To better understand U.S. female military spouse's experiences seeking employment after a military relocation and their perceived self-esteem, I first sought to identify research that had previously been studied on this topic. In this literature review, first I discuss the research on the concept of trailing spouses. Next, I discuss how military spouses can be considered a subset of the broader concept of trailing spouses. Then I

discuss the negative impacts of military relocation on military spouses. Finally, I discuss how perception of self-esteem after a relocation.

Trailing Spouses

The phenomenon of one spouse giving up their own employment stability for another is not new. One term used for this phenomenon is *trailing spouse.* Trailing spouses usually leave employment and other aspects of stability behind to keep the family unit intact when the other spouse starts a new employment endeavor requiring a move, usually abroad (Slobodin, 2019). While the term is most often used to refer to spouses who follow their partners to a different country for a professional opportunity (Cangia, 2018), some academic research also uses the term to refer to domestic reassignment.

The role of gender in the phenomenon of trailing spouses cannot be underestimated. The notion of a trailing spouse has typically been associated with a nonworking dependent wife (Cangia, 2018). Historically, attempting to preserve the cultural expectation of a heteronormative nuclear family, regardless of the personal sacrifice of the trailing spouse who is more often the woman or wife, has been a standard (Roderick, 2012). Many women, who are trailing spouses, experience changes in family roles and dynamics, finding themselves in the lead caretaker role and suspension or termination of their work role identity (Rowsen et al., 2021). This suspension in work identity may be due in part to having the responsibility of being available for family demands, a task often assigned to wives, since many trailing spouses reside away from extended family supports (Rowsen et al., 2021).

There are many challenges associated with being a trailing spouse. For example, some trailing spouses may experience insecurity, instability, frustration, and uncertainty regarding their future employment (Cangia, 2018). Further, issues with language proficiency, work permits, or non-equivalent qualifications, childcare, and community support are a challenge that trailing spouses may face when their spouse is assigned outside of the United States (Mutter, 2017; Rowsen et al., 2021). Even after finding employment after relocation, sometimes trailing spouses report less prestigious, unappealing, or undesirable working conditions when compared to prior work, and lower pay (McNulty & Moeller, 2018; Rowsen et al., 2021). Sometimes trailing spouses attempt to make a dual-career household work. However, these dual-career households can be a challenge when both individuals have a strong commitment or passion to their profession (McNulty & Moeller, 2018).

How a trailing spouse responds to their circumstances varies. McNulty and Moeller (2018) identified four categories of trailing spouses: ready, re-born, resentful, and resigned. Spouses categorized as *ready* report feeling empowered, refuse to accept dual-career defeat, refuse to adopt the trailing spouse lifestyle as their end identity, and typically work in the same profession as the one back home. Spouses that are considered *reborn* can initially be resentful but able to re-establish a new identity after relocation and were able to find new employment. Those who are *resentful* may be aggressive, but this is because they may feel defeated and angry due to the loss of their identity. The *resigned* can be passive, defeated, depressed, and accept the trailing spouse lifestyle. McNulty and Moeller concluded that depending on the attitudes that the trailing spouses have about the

relocation, the results of these moves can result in divorce, living apart, or routinely swapping the lead career role to accommodate for the other spouse.

Some trailing spouses may leave employment purposefully. Slobodin (2019) suggested that some trailing spouses saw their relocation as a temporary retreat from reality, which for some may have been demanding and stressful compared to life abroad. According to McNulty and Moeller (2018), engagement and feeling connected to support structures other than employment positively influenced the transition to the new culture. Withdrawing from employment, as a trailing spouse, was found to support the spouses to reinvent themselves and move past simply functioning (Elliott, 2020). As such, there is no one overarching experience to relocation.

Military Service Members and Spouses

In many ways, a military spouse could be considered a "trailing spouse" because of repeated relocation due to their spouse's assignments, and this affects their ability to find employment once relocations have occurred (Blakely et al., 2014).

Like trailing spouses, military spouses frequently leave behind stability, whether that is from employment, extended family, or their own identity when their active-duty partner is relocated. And the number of individuals who are impacted by military relocations is substantial. As Table 1 shows, in 2020 there were over 2.9 million family members (i.e., spouses, children, and adult dependents) of active-duty service members in the United States. That means 2.9 million family members potentially will or have been affected by military relocation. There are approximately 1,333,822 United States Department of Defense active-duty service members (DoD Demographics Report, 2020).

The majority of these are enlisted personnel (1,099,188) while 234,634 are officers. Of particular note, across all branches of service, the majority of military spouses are female.

Table 1

2020 Demographic Profile of the United States Military Community: Active-Duty Families (DoD Demographics Report)

Family Members of Active Duty	Spouses	597,737
	Children	964,485
	Adult Dependents	7,619
Marital Status	Married	665,764
	Never Married	602,452
	Divorced	63,486
	Other	2,119
Gender of Spouses	Male	55,315
	Female	542,421
Spouse ages[a]	>25 yrs	140,274
	26-30 y/o	112,535
	31-35 y/o	132,657
	36-40 y/o	96,167
	41 yrs or older	83,051

Note. Table 1 provides demographic information of United States military service family members/dependents taken from the 2020 Demographics Profile of the Military Community report sponsored by the Department of Defense (DoD).

Military Spouse Relocation and Well-being

It is common for military personnel and their partners to relocate to different duty stations every 2 to 3 years, one-third moving approximately every year (Ribeiro et al., 2023). If the couple works together as a team and their goals are aligned, these transitions can make adjustments a bit easier for the military spouse because the military spouse feels a sense of autonomy. For example, if the motivation to relocate is perceived by the partner to be their choice, their sense of autonomy is stronger than if they feel they were

persuaded or coerced (de Araujo, 2021). However, when a partner feels loss of control over the trajectory of their life, it can make them feel they have loss a sense of autonomy.

Likewise, an individual's sense of competence can be impacted due to continual relocation of military spouses. According to de Araujo (2021), for the individuals who have followed their active-duty military partner due to relocation, some may feel irrelevant or inadequate as well as feel loss during some point in the relocation. This can be due to the lack of opportunities or perception thereof, to showcase their capabilities and skillset (de Araujo, 2021).

With a reduction in autonomy and sense of competence, relocation also impacts the sense of relatedness, or belonging, a military spouse may have. Having your own identity separate from your active-duty military partner can provide a military spouse with a sense of relatedness or belonging. This can be accomplished through connections or relationships with peers found in employment settings (Gribble et al., 2019). Conversely, in the study by Slobodin (2019), trailing spouses were able to cope with the loss of identity by reminding themselves that their situation was temporary, and time was irrelevant at that moment since they chose to take a break to follow their spouse.

Military relocations do adversely affect the spouses' professional and personal sense of competence, relatedness, and autonomy which in turn affects their well-being (Gribble et al., 2019). First, a military spouse's sense of autonomy may be impacted by postponing personal and professional goals due to frequent relocations. Second, establishing proficiency or competence in the work setting may be a challenge since frequent relocations change the environment and prevent stability and growth in one

location or profession. Third, forming relationships in a professional setting may also be difficult because the time spent in one location may not be long enough for military spouses to form strong bonds with others in the workplace. Because employment provides not only financial stability but also offers a sense of pride and achievement among military spouses, relocation can contribute to a reduction in well-being of military spouses (see Gribble et al., 2019).

Negative Impacts of Military Relocation for Military Spouses

Military relocation is an occupational demand for all branches of service. But this demand also extends to families and spouses of military personnel if they want to keep their family unit intact (Bakhurst et al., 2017). Some areas that military spouses identify as negatively impacted by military relocations is their career (Burke & Miller, 2018; Castaneda & Harrell, 2008; Huffman et al., 2019; Owen & Combs, 2017; Wang & Pullman, 2019), overall well-being (Gribble et al., 2019), social supports (Borah & Fina, 2017; Mailey et al., 2018; Runge et al., 2014), and family unit (Bakhurst et al., 2017). I address each of these challenges below.

Career Impacts

Research suggests that a military spouses' careers are impacted due to military relocation. After an examination of various studies, the research shows their careers are impacted in the following ways: through employment disruptions, seniority and career progression, and career portability overseas.

Employment Disruptions. Military relocation or permanent change of station (PCS) is a requirement for service members in all branches of the United States military

(Blaisure et al., 2016). As such, military relocations are common and 79% of military spouses reported experiencing at least one military relocation during their spouse's military career (Blue Star Families Military Family Lifestyle Survey, 2018). This experience of relocation, or being a trailing spouse, is approximately three times more than their civilian counterparts (Park, 2011).

In general, majority of military spouses, both male and female, will relocate at some point during their active-duty spouses' career. A survey of 605,716 military spouses of U.S. active-duty service members indicated that 81% had experienced at least one PCS move during their active-duty spouse's military career and 33% within the last 12 months (Office of People Analytics, 2019). Of the 81%, 35% of these military spouses stated it took them at least 7 months or more to find employment after their PCS move. According to this same survey, a PCS move more than doubles the likelihood that the military spouse will be unemployed at their next location (Office of People Analytics, 2019).

Military spouses who have experienced at least one PCS or relocation are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed. For example, even after finding employment after a PCS move, military spouses earn significantly less than spouses who have not experienced at least one relocation (Wang & Pullman, 2019). In another study, researchers found that migration among military spouses was associated with a 9% increase in unemployment, a 10% drop in employment, and a 4-hour decline in hours worked per week among this population (Cooke & Speirs, 2005).

Overall, multiple relocations significantly impact hours worked and earned income due to the frequency of moves and all the challenges of starting anew. On

average, military spouses earn less than their civilian counterparts even if they work the same number of hours (Meadows et al., 2016). Therefore, Military spouses earn approximately 14-25% less than civilian spouses (Burke & Miller, 2018). The impact on earnings decreases over time, however, even after 2 years, military spouses earn approximately 3% less than their civilian counterparts (Burke & Miller, 2018). This deficit can add up over time considering, on average, military families relocate every 2-4 years. Furthermore, research shows a larger reduction in pay when the military relocation is across state lines (Burke & Miller, 2018). Income not only provides economic stability but also provides an identity for military spouses. Income and status are key factors for overall well-being and quality of life (Trewick & Muller, 2014). Depending on the level of financial stress and perceived financial stability will determine well-being and life satisfaction even when there was social support and work-life balance present (Wang & Pullman, 2019).

Seniority and Career Progression. In addition to impacting earnings, military relocation can impede the progression of military spouses in their career development (Ziff & Garland-Jackson, 2020). Sometimes employment transitions become lateral or downward moves in terms of career progression (Eby, 2001). Opportunities for promotions and job advancement for military spouses are sometimes negatively impacted due to frequent relocation (Eby, 2001). Accordingly, frequent relocation can impact the trend of upward mobility in a profession.

Not only is finding employment a concern but finding careers in the spouse's field of practice may be a challenge. Spouses with careers that are not considered to be in high

demand may have enhanced challenges with career progression or finding careers related to their field (Huffman et al., 2019). Further, employers may be hesitant to hire military spouses due to frequent relocations because of substantiated employer bias, costly investment in job-specific training, and lengthy learning curves (Hosek & Wadsworth, 2013). Frequent relocations make it challenging for military spouses to progress in their career goals due to being unable to fulfill time requirements, such as completing a probationary period. Therefore, specialized fields such as nursing, social work, or counseling which require supervision or licensure hours, may be challenging for military spouses to complete due to frequent relocations (Borah & Fina, 2017).

Career Portability Overseas. The type of career may impact the portability and career success of military spouses, especially when relocating overseas. Foreign or overseas military relocation can be a challenge for military spouses regarding finding employment (Elliott, 2020). Not all foreign countries allow for American civilians to work within their country outside the U.S. installation, remotely, or from home (Elliott, 2019). In some countries, there are agreements between the foreign government and the U.S. government which permit U.S. civilians to only work on U.S. installations (Elliott, 2019). However, many positions on the installations are sometimes limited and held by local nationals (Elliott, 2019). National rules and regulations may add to the issue of military spouse unemployment due to their restrictions (Elliott, 2019).

Impacts to Overall Well-being

Well-being can be analyzed through a psychological lens, or via physical health, or both. Psychological well-being can be defined by how an individual self-measures

their life satisfaction, self-efficacy, self-esteem, positive affect, or lack of negative affect (Martela & Sheldon, 2019; O'Neal, 2020). Physical well-being can be defined by how an individual self-measures their level of physical functioning (Martela & Sheldon, 2019). For the purposes of this study, the focus will be on psychological well-being or a spouse's self-esteem, experienced through the achievement of basic psychological needs autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Although there are many stressors that come with a military lifestyle, many military families still report overall healthy functioning (Sullivan et al., 2021). Resilience can be attributed to enduring and managing stress despite the military lifestyle (Wang & Pullman, 2019)). Family resilience is being able to stay positive on a familial level in the face of adversity (Sullivan et al., 2021). Communities and social outlets play an important role in helping families stay resilient (O'Neal, 2020). Research findings have suggested that military families who are involved or feel a part of their community rate their overall well-being higher than families who are not involved or do not feel a part of their community (O'Neal, 2020). The feeling of community can also be found through employment. Therefore, if relocation can negatively impact employment, then it can potentially impact well-being.

Psychological Well-being. Prior researchers have linked strong social networks with spouse adjustment (Copeland & Norrell, 2002) and the importance of social networks in promoting military spouse adjustment (Wang et al., 2015). As a core source of social connection, employment has been found to provide military spouses with an outlet for social connections outside the military setting and provide them with a sense of

purpose and value (Gribble et al., 2019). Social connections found in work environments have also been found to be significantly correlated with marital satisfaction, psychological distress, and overall well-being for military spouses. This not only promotes positive adjustment for military spouses but also allows service members to commit to staying in the military (Crouch et al., 2016).

Researchers have suggested that employment contributes to the psychological well-being and quality of life of military spouses (Trewick & Muller, 2014). Work has been found to provide a sense of pride and self-esteem, being perceived to hold greater social value than exclusively being a stay-at-home spouse (Rowsen et al., 2021). Employed military spouses have been found to have overall higher levels of psychological health and well-being compared to unemployed military spouses (Trewick & Muller, 2014). Self-esteem has also been found to be higher in employed women versus unemployed women (Alka & Midha, 2015). This may be attributed to the quality of social relationships when employed (Trewick & Muller, 2014). Overall, a healthy sense of psychological well-being means better perception on quality of life and lower rates of mental health issues.

Active-duty spouses are aware of the impacts relocation has on their spouses. Huffman et al. (2019) reported that service members believed the military lifestyle does hurt their spouses' career progression and well-being and that many service members saw employment as an identity that their spouse can have outside of being a military spouse. According to Rowsen et al. (2021), some supportive spouses understand the importance

of redeveloping work identity but identify that work activities still must fit around their spouse's role of primary caretaker and/or homemaker (2021).

Identity and purpose, which both can be found through employment, play a role in overall well-being. That is, having a sense of identity and overall well-being could combat boredom, feeling incomplete and unrecognizable, and potentially end cycles of marital discord (Huffman et al., 2019; Rowsen et al., 2021). Employment may also provide self-fulfillment and a sense of personal achievement (Huffman et al., 2019). Researchers also found that employment can contribute to military spouses' formulation of independent identity through a professional setting (Gribble et al., 2019).

Having a good social support system is also essential to overall well-being. However, support systems found through employment and local networks are displaced after relocation causing social and emotional disruption for a spouse, according to research by Gudmundsdottir et al. (2018). Social support or experiencing connections may be important in determining the likelihood of general adjustment and the overall psychological well-being of a spouse. Living overseas can also lead to lower psychological well-being due to differences in culture, living conditions, and language. International moves or even out-of-state moves are challenging to the whole family considering everyone must reestablish social networks and identify new community resources (Spencer et al., 2016). As a result, this was found to lead to lower rates of marital satisfaction, lower retention of military personnel, and lower rates of physical health (Burrell et al., 2006). A decline in psychological well-being can lead to depression, anxiety, sleep disorders, and other various mental health issues (Padden & Posey, 2013).

A study conducted by Ribeiro, Renshaw & Allen (2023) also found that frequent military relocation can contribute to a spouse's psychological distress. In this study, psychological distress was measured by assessing the spouse's level of self-esteem using the Single-Item Self Esteem measure (SISE). Researchers found that there was greater psychological distress among spouses due to military moves versus length of separation from their military spouse due to deployments. This increased spouses' risk of depressive symptoms and stress. The frequent moves also impacted continuity of care which made significant negative impacts for spouses already dealing with mental health concerns.

Physical Well-being. Employment for military spouses is not only important for psychological well-being. Research shows that employed military spouses have better physical health and well-being compared to unemployed military spouses (Trewick & Muller, 2014). Researchers have found amongst the population of full-time employees, their perceived health and physical functioning was at a slower decline versus the unemployed population (Trewick & Muller, 2014). Unfortunately, a decline in physical well-being can lead to sleep disturbance, fatigue, headaches, changes in appetite, and weight changes (Padden & Posey, 2013).

In addition to physical health more generally, frequent military relocation can significantly impact healthcare for military families. Frequent moves can cause poor continuity of care and difficulty creating good patient-provider relationships (Gleason & Beck, 2017). Along with this, some moves are to remote locations that have reduced access to care. Sometimes care is sought out in communities where providers lack the

knowledge or military cultural competency to be able to fully support the military family (Borah & Fina, 2017).

Strong communication and flexibility within a family unit is important for familial resilience (O'Neal et al., 2016). Being flexible with familial roles, having regular family interactions, and engendering a supportive atmosphere build family cohesion, which in turn provide overall well-being for the family and service member (O'Neal et al., 2016). Because, as noted above, trailing spouses are more often women and are more likely to be tasked with familial duties, a stressful impact to the family can also increase the stress to the military spouse.

Support Programs for Military Spouses

The use of employment support programs by military spouses have been found to positively impact military retention of active-duty service members (Webber & Vogel, 2019). Feelings of recognition and value by the military and feeling like their career sacrifices were acknowledged and appreciated by the military, can develop feelings of connection and support not only for the spouses but the service members as well (Godier-McBard et al., 2020). The military can benefit from mimicking programs designed for expatriate or trailing spouses to assist with better supporting a smoother transition for spouses of service members. For example, information sessions discussing cultural differences can help to better prepare for potential cross-cultural adjustment issues for military spouses (Webber & Vogel, 2019). Additionally, advance or sufficient notice was found to be important for the trailing spouses to be able to investigate what potential

career options there may be, along with employment counseling to include education enhancement and work permit assistance (Webber & Vogel, 2019).

Five programs, created by the DoD, to assist military spouses with either finding employment or education advancement are the Military Spouse Center Advancement Accounts (MyCAA) tuition assistance program, the Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP), and the Military Spouse Career Center. The creation of the noncompetitive hiring process and Military Spouse Preference Program (MSP) was also created to assist and support military spouses with finding and obtaining employment. However, even after the implementation of numerous government initiatives, spousal employment is still considered to be a problem among military spouses (Blue Star Families Military Family Lifestyle Survey, 2020).

Military Spouse Center Advancement Accounts (MyCAA)

The MyCAA was created in 2007 as a demonstration project to assist military spouses with advancing their education and providing for better opportunities to find portable employment (United States Government Accountability Office Report to Congressional Committees, 2012). To start the process of enrollment, a spouse must identify the course of study, create an educational plan, and apply for tuition assistance (United States Government Accountability Office Report to Congressional Committees, 2012). However, not all fields of study qualify for tuition assistance. The DoD and Department of Labor define which education or training they consider being portable and likely to have job openings close to military installations (United States Government Accountability Office Report to Congressional Committees, 2012). In its early inception,

MyCAA offered up to $6,000 in tuition funds to include certificates, licenses, bachelor's, and advanced degrees to spouses of active-duty service members (United States Government Accountability Office Report to Congressional Committees, 2012). Several changes have been made since 2009 to include eligibility criteria targeting spouses of junior service members, reduction of benefits to $4,000, and funds only used for certificates and licenses, excluding bachelors and advanced degrees (United States Government Accountability Office Report to Congressional Committees, 2012). Funds have declined while access to funds have become more challenging.

Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP)

The MSEP was established in 2011 to connect military spouses with over 420 companies and organizations that are committed specifically to hiring military spouses (Congressional Research Service, 2020). The jobs that are offered through this partnership are reportedly transferable and portable (GAO-19-320R: My Career Advancement Account, 2019). MSEP is a web-based portal that is accessed by military spouses upon requesting registration with MSEP. The portal houses a search engine that shows current job openings with participating employers and assists with resume building (GAO-13-60: Military Spouse Employment Programs, 2012).

Military Spouse Career Center

The main purpose of the Military Spouse Career Center is to help military spouses achieve their educational and career goals through coaching and job search assistance (GAO-21-193: Military Spouse Employment, 2021). The Career Center is comprised of a call center, houses employment counselors, and has a website that provides information

about career options, resume building, interviewing tips, and job search engines. The counselors at the Career Center also provide information on how to navigate other employment programs offered through the DoD (GAO-13-60: Military Spouse Employment Programs, 2012).

Noncompetitive Appointment Authority for Military Spouses

Through the noncompetitive authority, federal agencies like the DoD, Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), Social Security Administration (SSA), and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) can hire eligible and qualified military spouses without going through the competitive hiring process (GAO-13-60: Military Spouse Employment Programs, 2012). Three main eligibility criteria for military spouses are: (a) a spouse of a service member on active-duty orders, (b) spouse of a retired, separated, or discharged service member with a 100% service-connected disability, or (c) spouse of a service member who died while on active-duty orders and who has not remarried (Congressional Research Service, 2020). This unique program can provide a much needed advantage for military spouses who may be at a disadvantage due to frequent relocations.

DoD's Military Spouse Preference (MSP) program

The MSP provides eligible military spouses priority selection for certain federal jobs (GAO-13-60: Military Spouse Employment Programs, 2012). Military spouses under this must be determined to be the best qualified, however cannot be selected against another candidate with veterans' preference. The MSP can only be used once at each duty station and resets after each PCS move. Eligibility criteria for the MSP program are: (a) must have relocated with an active-duty service member to a new duty

station via PCS, (b) must be married to the service member on or before the date of the service member's order getting authorized for the PCS move, and (c) must be determined to be the best qualified for the position (Congressional Research Service, 2020).

Efficacy of DOD Programs

MyCAA was found to be nominally successful but as time progressed, fewer spouses were using it. From the fiscal year 2011 to 2017, data gathered from the DoD suggest a 40% decline in military spouse tuition assistance (GAO-19-320R: My Career Advancement Account, 2019). In the fiscal year 2011, about 38,000 spouses received assistance whereas in 2017 about 21,000 spouses received tuition assistance (GAO-19-320R: My Career Advancement Account, 2019). DoD officials have stated various reasons for the decline in assistance, including improved labor markets or because of personal reasons like family obligations (GAO-19-320R: My Career Advancement Account, 2019). However, DoD also found the decline may have been due to lack of awareness of the assistance program, inaccurate information listed on the outreach material, and technical difficulties accessing the MyCAA website (GAO-19-320R: My Career Advancement Account, 2019).

Many efforts by DoD and nonprofit organizations continue to work on decreasing the rate of unemployed or underemployed military spouses by creating new initiatives and programs to help educate or employ these spouses. However, according to a recent report by the National Military Spouse Network (NMSN), the government continues to spend an abundance of money creating programs that they do not actively oversee through data collection to see if the programs are in fact helping to support their mission

(2023). It is recommended that standardized reporting requirements be created by the government and overseen on a state level and the data be made visible and transparent to all parties involved.

Summary and Conclusion

Chapter 2 provided literature on the background of SDT and how this theoretical foundation can be used to understand the effects of military relocation on female military spouses' employment, their self-esteem and their overall well-being. Exploration of the effects of employment and military relocation on physical and psychological well-being was addressed in this chapter, along with how service members are affected by spousal employment and well-being. This chapter also provided background information on various military employment programs that are currently available to assist military spouses.

In Chapter 3, in-depth information regarding the research design and methodology of this study will be provided. Discussion of instrumentation and the method of collecting data will be provided. The rationale of how the targeted population was chosen and the method of recruiting participants will be discussed. Last, ethical considerations, researcher bias, and evidence of trustworthiness will be provided.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This generic qualitative study will explore U.S. female military spouses' experiences of seeking employment after relocation due to military reassignments and their perceived self-esteem post relocation. In this chapter, I will restate the research questions and elaborate on the research design chosen for this study. Also, I will discuss the rationale behind the chosen research tradition. Finally, I will discuss my role as the researcher and identify any issues with trustworthiness.

Research Design and Rationale

This generic qualitative study was guided by the following research question: What are U.S. female military spouses' experiences seeking employment after military relocation and their perceived self-esteem post relocation? Due to the disruptive nature of a relocation, I sought to explore spouses' perceptions of themselves after their experiences in seeking employment after military relocation.

The central concepts of this research study are military relocation of spouses and self-esteem. The first concept; military relocation, or permanent change of station (PCS), is when the active duty service member relocates (usually accompanied by their family) from one duty station to another based on the needs of the branch of service (Blaisure et al., 2016). If married, the active duty service member's spouse, or military spouse, is enrolled in the Defense Enrollment and Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS; a system that verifies dependents that qualify for military-based services and benefits) and is deemed a legal dependent of the service member (Blaisure et al., 2016). The second concept, well-being or more closely identified as self-esteem, is the self-measurement on

how an individual feels (life satisfaction, positive affect, or lack of negative affect) along with how that individual is functioning (Martela & Sheldon, 2019). One key study that tied both concepts together was a qualitative study conducted by Gribble et al. (2019) which reported that military relocation does adversely affect military spouses' professional and personal sense of competence, relatedness, and autonomy, which in turn affects their well-being. However, what is not known is whether US female military spouses would have the same outcome as the UK spouses in the Gribble study.

To fully examine the experiences of my research population, a qualitative method is the best fit for this study. A qualitative research method will allow me to investigate the phenomenon of study in-depth using semistructured interviews to help provide data that would not easily be able to be translated into numbers (see Anderson, 2010). By using the qualitative method, I will further provide meaning to the phenomenon being studied, helping to offer insight into the perspective of the population being studied: the military spouses who are affected by a PCS (see Danford, 2023).

The design that best suits this type of research exploration is the generic design. According to Percy et al. (2015), researchers seeking a population's subjective "take" on actual external happenings and events should consider generic qualitative inquiry as their approach. This type of design investigates individual's reports of their subjective opinions, attitudes, beliefs, or reflections on their experiences and allows for full rich description of the phenomenon of study from the participants' perspective. Using my study topic as an example, research has shown that 81% of military spouses had relocated at least once and potentially may need to find new employment (Office of People

Analytics, 2019). However, there is no research indicating how these spouses think and feel about relocation or how those feelings and ideas influence their well-being. As such, it is first important to identify what participants think and feel about this topic. Thus, I will use the generic design for my study.

Role of the Researcher

How I address and mitigate my personal lens/worldview during data collection and analysis is a key component for the study. According to Fusch (2015), hearing and understanding the perspective of others may be one of the most difficult dilemmas that a researcher faces. A way to combat this dilemma is to be able to recognize personal view of the world and discern the presence of a personal lens to better hear and interpret the behavior and reflections of others and represent them in the data that is collected (Dibley, 2011; Fields & Kafai, 2009). Therefore, it is important that a novice researcher recognizes their own personal role in the study and mitigates any concerns during data collection (Chenail, 2011). Furthermore, part of the discussion should address how this is demonstrated through understanding when the data is saturated by mitigating the use of one's personal lens during the data collection process of the study (Dibley, 2011). Hence, a researcher's cultural and experiential background will contain biases, values, and ideologies (Chenail, 2011) that can affect when the data is indeed saturated (Bernard, 2012).

As the interviewer, I will be the main instrument for this study. As such, I must be aware of my personal preconceived notions and knowledge of the phenomenon of study and not allow it to interfere with my relationship as interviewer (see Bengtsson, 2016). I

currently am a US female military spouse of an active-duty service member. I also have experience relocating every 2-3 years due to military relocations. It has been a challenge and sometimes a struggle for me to find employment, which in turn I have found to affect my overall well-being. Due to these experiences, I must be careful not to place my personal biases or coerce in any way the outcome of this research study. Additionally, since I have prior knowledge of the phenomenon of study, I must be vigilant in not allowing personal biases to interfere with the research process (see Yilmaz, 2013).

To keep my biases in check, I will be mindful of my own experiences by keeping a reflective journal, share my journal periodically with my Chair, engage in bracketing, and utilize the interviewing the investigator approach. Keeping and using reflective journals will enable me to make my experiences, opinions, thoughts, and feelings visible and an acknowledged part of the research design, data generation, analysis, and interpretation process. Ongoing journalling during research can make the messiness of the research process visible to the researcher who can then address it overtly in discussion of the method and thus avoid producing, reproducing, and circulating the discourse of research as a neat and linear process (Ortlipp, 2008).

The purpose of journaling is to practice bracketing. Bracketing is an approach that helps a researcher control personal bias. Bracketing means to become more aware of my personal experiences, feelings, and emotions related to the topic of study (see Baksh, 2018). Bracketing allows a researcher to acknowledge their personal history, epistemological position, and ontological perspective. The theoretical framework reflects the qualitative theory guiding the researcher in the specific study (Sorsa et al., 2015).

According to Chenail (2011), interviewing the investigator approach is when either the researcher takes the role of interviewee and recruits a colleague to play the role of interviewer, or the researcher can play both interviewee and interviewer. This is a helpful approach to check the quality of the interview protocol and check for any potential researcher bias. It is an effective approach especially if the researcher has a strong affinity to the population being studied or is also a member of the population, which is true in my case (see Chenail, 2011).

In addition to bias, I also must be mindful of power differentials when I conduct my research (see Ortlipp, 2008). A potential ethical issue in my research is the possibility of dual relationships. Since I work on the military installation and reside within the military community outside the installation, I run the risk of recruiting a participant who I either am familiar with on a personal or professional level. To address this, I will only recruit and include participants who I have no prior relationship outside this research study.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

The specific targeted population for this study is U.S. female military spouses who relocated at least once with their active-duty spouse. Participants will be recruited using purposeful and snowball sampling concurrently. Purposeful sampling refers to specifically recruiting participants who have knowledge about the phenomenon being studied (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Patton, 2002;). I intend to recruit participants from social media groups (i.e., Facebook) targeted specifically for military spouse

members. Additionally, I will use snowball sampling, which is a type of recruitment that asks current participants for potential recruits that have similar characteristics as them (Palinkas et al., 2015). This process is, by necessity, repetitive: informants refer the researcher to other informants, who are contacted by the researcher and then refer them to yet other informants, and so on. Snowball sampling is arguably the most widely employed method of sampling in qualitative research in various disciplines across the social sciences (Noy, 2008).

The inclusion criteria include the following elements. First, participants must be women who are currently married to active-duty service members. There is no preference in rank (i.e., junior enlisted, noncommissioned officer, senior NCO, officers). Second, the participants must have completed a minimum of one PCS move prior to the interview. Participants may potentially be chosen from various installations nationwide. There will be no specific branch of service selected for this study. Instead, there is a possibility that military spouses from all military branches can be selected for this study.

Social media (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn) and word-of-mouth (i.e., Family Readiness Group, friends, family, networking) will be used for recruitment for this study. An email account will be created specifically for this study. This email account will be provided along with a brief description of what the study is about and what is expected of a participant. This information will be handed out (i.e., FRG, friends, family) on a flyer and posted online (i.e., Facebook groups, Twitter, LinkedIn). People who are interested in becoming participants will be invited to email me with their contact information so I can screen them and set up an interview.

Potential participants will be screened by phone to ensure they meet the criterion above prior to scheduling an interview date and time. Once I have determined they meet the inclusion criteria, I will email them the consent form and ask them to reply "I consent" prior to the interview. Interviews will be conducted through Zoom according to their schedule and preference. The goal of this study will be to interview a sample size of 8-12 US female military spouses who have experienced on PCS.

According to Fusch et al., (2015) data saturation is reached when there is enough information to replicate the study, when the ability to obtain additional new information has been attained, and when further coding is no longer feasible. Sample size and data saturation will be determined when no new data is being provided by the participants or that the data being provided is not adding anything of quality to the study (Mason, 2010). As such, I have set a range of participants from 8-12 (see Fusch et al., 2015).

Instrumentation

In this study, use of a semistructured interview will be the key instrument in receiving and collecting the data through interviewing participants using open-ended questions (Jacob et al., 2012). An audio-tape device will be used as an instrument to record the interviews in addition to recording the interview on Zoom. After every interview is completed, the external audio will be uploaded and saved on my password protected laptop. The audio will then be deleted.

An interview protocol that I produced and is specific to this study will be used. As mentioned by Jacob et al. (2012), the interview protocol and questions will ensure the interview is conducted the same every time and help mitigate any bias. It will provide a

script for before and after the interview and will also provide a prompt to discuss consent. The interview protocol will serve as a procedural guide for the study. The interview questions will be written using information from the literature review and theory. The interview protocol and questions will be reviewed by my committee and peers for clarity. See Appendix A for the full interview protocol.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Data will be gathered by me through interviews collected from 8-12 female military spouses. One on one interviews will be scheduled with participants at a time and date of their choosing that works for their schedule. The interviews will last approximately 45min long, excluding explanation of consent form (5min) and debrief (10min) at the end of the interview for an anticipated total of 60min. The data (interviews) will be recorded by using an audio recorder and on Zoom and labeled Participant 1 through Participant 12 (P1-P12). A follow-up plan, if recruitment results are too few, is to utilize the Walden participant pool.

After the end of the interview a debrief will take place. An explanation will be provided to the participants of what the data will be used for and contribution of the research to the phenomenon being studied. To maintain trustworthiness of the data, participants will be sent a copy of their transcript so they can review and clarify if needed. Member checking helps control potential researcher bias and further provides credibility to the research study (Anney, 2014). The research-specific email will be used to share results with each participant once the study is complete.

My interview questions are based off my research question and phenomenon of interest. The initial four questions are 'ice breakers' to get the participant to share personal data, build rapport, and get comfortable with me. Questions 5-7 inquire as to how many relocations the interviewee has experienced and what their experience was like. Questions 8-10 inquire as to what the interviewee's employment experience is and if the interviewee has ever utilized a program specifically to help military spouses find employment. Questions 11-15 touch upon the theoretical foundation of this study, which is SDT and its relationship to overall well-being of military spouses. The interview questions can be found in Appendix D.

Data Analysis Plan

I plan to utilize Yin's five step process (2013) which is compile, disassemble, reassemble, interpret, and conclude to analyze and interpret the data collected. First, I plan to compile data by coding similar ideas into groups. I intend to take data from all interviews and my journaling (reflective journal) and start grouping similar ideas.

Next, I plan to disassemble coded groups of words to create broader categories and assign names to the segments and combine like codes into broader groupings. I intend to utilize predetermined apriori codes that I have identified from the theory I have chosen to use for this research study, which is SDT. Also, I intend to utilize codes that I have identified from my literature review.

Then, I plan to look for patterns among the codes, reassemble broader groups into categories and name the categories. I will then examine the common message in the category and analyze the commonality to determine themes, eliminate the redundancies,

and summarize the final themes that emerged from the analysis. After summarizing the themes, I intend to compare patterns found within the coding, interpret the themes, and summarize the data into narratives to provide a comprehensive review. Finally, I will conclude the analysis and compare with existing theories and studies according to Yin's five step process.

Issues of Trustworthiness

There are four key elements to a trustworthy study. Researchers need to account for the credibility, transferability, dependability, and the confirmability of a study. In this next section, I define each concept and discuss how I will attend to each in my study.

Credibility

Anney (2014) defines credibility as being able to show confidence in the research findings through plausible information from data collected. Credibility is achieved when the data is correctly interpreted to show the participant's original viewpoint (Anney, 2014).

Peer review is a strategy utilized for credibility. According to, McMahon & Winch (2018), peer review or debriefing is when the researcher or lead interviews whomever collected the data after the collection process. McMahon et al., state the reason for the debriefing step is to identify strengths and weaknesses of the interviewer to make sure quality data is collected, but also identify any potential gaps in data (i.e., non-verbal information, triangulate data, build theory). Lincoln et al. (1985) defines peer review as a 'devil's advocate' to the researcher or someone who will keep the researcher unbiased through questioning, fact checking, and holding them accountable with their standards of

methodology. Peer debriefing sessions are also used as a tool to keep track of written accounts of sessions between researcher and reviewer. Accordingly, I will seek guidance from my chair and my second committee member on both the creation of the study and my analysis.

Another tool used to show credibility in a study is achieving data saturation. Data saturation is achieved when enough data is obtained to be able to replicate the study and no further information can provide new insight into what is being studied (Fusch et al., 2015). This occurs when similar information is being provided among participants and these participants may recommend other participants that the researcher has already collected data from (Alam, 2019). Data saturation can affect the credibility and validity of my study, so if data saturation is not accomplished within the planned 12 interviews, I plan to continue recruiting more participants and collecting data until this is accomplished.

Transferability

According to Polit & Beck (2010), transferability is the ability to transfer information from the study to other settings and populations because of how detailed the description of the findings are and shared characteristics. Including action verbs, quotes, and contextual description can be helpful in providing thick description. Adding thick, rich description via verbatim to the interview transcripts can help determine whether a study is transferable to another setting. In making sure my research can be utilized in other settings, I intend to provide thick, rich description in interview transcripts, but also

provide adequate details regarding field notes like how the data was collected which will be noted in my reflective journaling.

Dependability

According to Lincoln et al. (1985) and Creswell et al. (2016), dependability in qualitative research means that the research findings are consistent and repeatable. If the study is replicated the new study would result in similar findings. Dependability is established through an audit trail or triangulation. According to Anney (2016), an audit trail is a detailed account of how data was collected. Documents that are used for cross checking, or triangulation, are raw data, interview and observation notes, records collected from the field, and test scores. Triangulation can be established through comparing interview notes with field notes, and any other data collected during the member checking process.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the degree to which data results are accurately interpreted from the data collected from participants (Elo et al., 2014). Reflective journaling is a tool, along with keeping an audit trail and triangulation, that I plan to utilize in this study to accomplish confirmability along with dependability and transferability. According to Ortlipp (2008), reflective journals are critical self-reflections used to write down experiences, thoughts, feelings, and opinions throughout the research process.

Ethical Procedures

In order to minimize any risk to participants of this study, I will consider and construct important safeguards and standards for ethical procedures. In keeping with the

standards of the Belmont Report (1979), the three basic ethical principles (beneficence, respect for others, and justice) are managed through precise procedures. First, proper approval from Walden University's IRB will be obtained. Then approval from the various Facebook groups that I plan to post flyers on will be acquired. Initial consent of the participant will be received via email, and they will be asked to read an IRB approved informed consent from, and reply "I consent" to the form, prior to taking part in the interview. Correspondence of a scheduled date and time of their interview will follow. Verbal consent will also be obtained from the participant on the day of the interview prior to moving forward with the interview questions.

Second, every effort to ensure the privacy of all participants will be achieved by making sure no identifiable information is used within the data presented. Results will be anonymous, and transcripts will be kept confidential. Data and identifying demographic information obtained from participants will be stored on a password protected laptop owned solely by me. Only I will have access to the data though some quotes will be included in the dissertation, these quotes will be reviewed for privacy such that no identifying information will be shared. No names will be used in the transcripts, but instead a numbering system will be applied. Transcripts will be destroyed upon the guidance of the IRB (5 years after study completion). A Zoom platform will be utilized versus in-person interviews to minimize the risk of a violation of the participant's privacy. This is due to logistical issues like the area being rural and remote and there not being many options for private interview settings. Also, due to continued COVID concerns and restrictions, some participants may be hesitant to participate in-person.

Last, conflict of interest will be mitigated by thoroughly screening participants. The initial screening process will ensure that participants meet the inclusion criterion. Once participants pass the initial screening and provide consent to participate, then they will be screened further to find out how they found out about the interview. If the potential participant works at the hospital on the military installation where I am employed, and/or if the participants currently utilize behavioral health services or have ever been involved with Family Advocacy Program on the base where I am employed, they will not be interviewed for the study. Since I currently am employed by the hospital on the military installation and work as a social worker for the Family Advocacy Program under the umbrella of behavioral health, all participants who fall under these categories will be excluded from the study.

Summary

Chapter 3 identified and discussed the research design and rationale of the study, which was a generic qualitative approach used to explore the personal opinions, beliefs, and experiences of the phenomenon being studied, which are US female military spouses. The identification of participant criterion and rationale for selection for this study was discussed, along with specific procedures of recruitment. Details describing instrumentation and data analysis plan were further elaborated. This chapter concluded with potential issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures.

In Chapter 4, results from the research study will be presented. This chapter will include further discussion of how data was collected and analyzed, and the specific setting and demographic information of the participants will be discussed. Further

discussion of trustworthiness will be presented before I then present the results of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore U.S. female military spouses' experiences seeking employment after military relocation and their self-esteem. This study answered the research question: What are the experiences of U.S. female military spouses seeking employment after relocation due to military reassignments and their perceived self-esteem post relocation? In this chapter, I will discuss the conditions that may have influenced the results of the study. Also, I will discuss the demographics of the research participants. Furthermore, I will discuss how the data was collected and analyzed. Then I will discuss the evidence of trustworthiness. Finally, I will discuss the results of my research study.

Setting

While interviewing the research participants, I was located at my personal residence, in the basement of my home. I was able to keep confidentiality by making sure no one was in the basement at the time of the interviews. The participants were at their personal residence, excluding one who was in her personal vehicle. Neither the participants nor I were located on any military installation at the time of the interviews.

Demographics

The participants for this research study were 13 females spouses currently married to U.S. active duty service members. Years married ranged from 1 to 23 years. Education ranged from 1st year undergraduate to completing a master's degree. All participants had completed at a minimum 1 PCS move prior to participation in this research study. Table 2 provides a numerical snapshot of the participant demographics.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

	Years Married	Highest Grade Completed	Employment Status	Number PCS Moves
Number of Participants	1-3yrs – 3 4-6yrs – 4 7-9yrs – 3 10+yrs – 3	HS Diploma - 1 Associates – 2 Bachelor's – 3 Master's –7	Employed fulltime – 7 Employed parttime – 1 Unemployed – 2 School/Internship – 3	1 move – 2 2 moves – 6 3 moves – 1 4 moves - 1 5 moves – 1 6+ moves - 2

Note. Demographic information collected from participants during interviews.

Data Collection

There were 13 participants in total for this study that participated in individual semi-structured interviews. The participants were recruited through a Facebook group called Career Military Spouses, which is not affiliated with any Department of Defense or federal agency. Snowball sampling was also used as a recruitment tool. Screening of participants was conducted via email using the designated email address created specifically for this study. The interview protocol was used for every interview.

All interviews were conducted using the Zoom platform. The interviews were conducted in my home (in the United States) on a locked personal laptop, using the Zoom platform that only I had access to, and all interviews were conducted in a private setting. All interviews were 45-60 minutes in duration and were recorded using the recording and transcription feature on Zoom.

The only variations in data collection from the plan presented in Chapter 3 was that no external recording device was used during the interviews. Also, no participants

from the Walden Participant Pool were used since there were enough participants who volunteered to participate and met the inclusion criteria. Participants were only interviewed once, with the exception of one participant. Her interview was divided into two sessions as she was unable to complete the first interview due to a time constraint. Participants were assigned numbers and their responses to questions 1 through 19 were logged into an excel spreadsheet.

Data Analysis

Yin's (2013) 5 step process was used to analyze the collected data from the 13 interviews along with data from my reflective journal. Data was compiled, disassembled, reassembled, and interpreted, which resulted in analysis and interpretation of data. While participants were interviewed, I journaled main points for each response and used this along with transcripts for my data collection. I then compiled the data collected into one excel spreadsheet from all the participants. Responses from the interviewees were summarized and placed according to the question answered, and if the question did not apply to the participant an 'N/A' was placed. Words used to describe responses from participants were descriptive in nature, focusing on keeping the main points provided by each participant while concentrating on verbs and adjectives.

I then cut the data into sections, disassembling the responses and creating subheadings. The following subheadings were used to group questions 1 through 19: ice breaker/build rapport (questions 1-6), relocations and experience (questions 7-9), employment and program experience (questions 10-12), and SDT and self-esteem (questions 13-19). To stay aligned with my research question, I focused on responses

from questions 7-19, taking note of participants' experiences with relocation and employment after each move, and their self-reflection on how they are currently doing or feeling on a personal and professional level. In reassembling the data, I then took direct quotes or words from the participants' responses, using in-vivo coding to categorize similar ideas into groups. I tallied how many times a certain descriptive word was used in responses. For example, if the word 'frustrated' was used to describe how a participant felt about not being able to find employment after a move, I counted how many participants used this word in their response for each question. These groups then became categories whose names came from the theory SDT and the literature review using a priori coding.

Hence, competence, relatedness, and autonomy were used as the first set of categories to interpret the data, which derived from components of SDT. Answers from the participants were further broken down by either a positive or negative response. Motivation, broken down by internal motivation and external motivation responses was also used since SDT was developed to introduce the idea that the self's primary task is to assimilate, coordinate, and regulate from both internal and external environmental factors (Ryan, 2020), giving meaning to human motivation. Also, self-esteem was a category since my research was to explore the participants perceived self-esteem post relocation, which was also broken down by a positive or negative response. Finally, challenges were the last category used, broken down by responses related to pay or etcetera (etc.) for other responses.

Table 3 shows compiled responses from participants describing their relocation experiences. Participants focused on how their personal and professional lives were affected by their PCS moves. Responses were a mix of both positive and negative experiences, with participants acknowledging that not all PCS moves were the same. Some participants took the experience as an opportunity to re-invent themselves and change their career paths, while some were forced to change their profession out of necessity and go back to school or take extra courses. Other participants were not able to work due to childcare issues, lack of employment opportunities, or licensing issues. Some participants had issues with reimbursement post PCS moves either due to lack of knowledge and/or assistance from the gaining installation. One participant discussed issues of racism in the small town she moved to during one PCS move. She stated "I didn't really have people who connected with me. I did experience some racism there." But overall, after leaving this small town she did state that she missed the area and looking back, "the experience was a lot better than what I anticipated."

Table 3

Relocations & Experience

	Relocations & Experience
Participant 1	Great experience, easier to move when no kids, 2nd PCS took couple months to adjust since no support and had 1st child, no childcare, huge transition-move, mom, COVID
Participant 2	Re-evaluate career, not challenged with job found, decided to go back to school
Participant 3	Was separate from spouse for 3 months, felt confusing and overwhelmed, used 2 days of PTO to move
Participant 4	Loved weather & area, connected at church, had friends, unemployed cause was overqualified, found job after few months, transfer positions when PCS, frustrated with lack of opportunities, COVID was stressful since put in limbo
Participant 5	Didn't know what to expect, paid out of pocket for move, no reimbursement, so much traveling, brought to little towns
Participant 6	Lost transfer (PCS) paperwork, miscommunicated expectations, not reimbursed for move, housing delayed
Participant 7	Had contract work, took 7 months find job, new baby overseas, no work, voluntold duties as spouse, professional gap, less pay
Participant 8	Better location for her and spouse, moved selves over weekend with no time-off from work, not everything reimbursed
Participant 9	Couldn't find work, childcare expensive, tried to stay back but hard on child
Participant 10	Not thrilled to PCS, step out of comfort zone, grow as person, get comfortable with self, forced get to know people and be alone, racism
Participant 11	Crap situation, installations are around lower socioeconomic areas
Participant 12	Hard, underpaid, housing and childcare issues, had newborn, 6 months until found job, licensing issues (requirements/setup)
Participant 13	New chapter, rediscovery of self, military spouses also have responsibility, be okay with being scared

Table 4 shows compiled responses from participants describing their current employment experience, approximately how long it took to find employment after the last PCS move and how that compares to other moves, and the different programs utilized post PCS moves to assist with finding employment. The programs were both on and off post, run by either government, non-profit organizations, or for-profit organizations. Participants who stated they currently are working in a remote position or had previously worked in one had easier moves when it came to employment since the position is portable versus others who worked or currently work in-person jobs. Other participants talked about having to switch occupations and go back to school and/or apprenticeships and obtain certificates or degrees so they could work these coveted remote jobs. In regard to programs used, almost half used some form of social media and there was a mix of programs offered on the installations and non-profit or state funded organizations off-post.

Table 4

Employment & Program Experience

	Employment & Program Experience
Participant 1	Work remote job, few years compared to 4 months, used social media group (non-military/government affiliated)
Participant 2	Work remote job, first job post PCS not challenging, obtained license in new field and started working remotely, no programs used
Participant 3	Laid off from remote job, looking for another remote job and getting ready to PCS again, used social media group (non-military/government affiliated)
Participant 4	Work in-person job on-post full-time, unemployed 1 year by choice, previously worked in field that was transferable but didn't like other location transferred to, used ACS and spousal preference program
Participant 5	Work in higher education in-person, had big employment gap, 8 months, used social media group (non-military/government affiliated), Military Spouse Employment CASY, Hiring Our Heroes, American Corp Partnership (ACP)
Participant 6	Work in-person job off-post, 2.5 months until found job, constant interviewing and applying, used Fleet & Family Center, job fairs on-post
Participant 7	In apprenticeship program different from degree, 1st move took 7 months until found job, 2nd-5th PCS moves didn't work, worked outside degree 6th-7th PCS move, rehired to old job, had to leave doctoral program, used Hiring Our Heroes, ACP, Military Family Support Center
Participant 8	Unemployed, interview for internship found of Facebook group, used My SECO, O2O
Participant 9	In-person job turned into remote after she inquired, used LinkedIn, USO, Pathfinder Transitions Program
Participant 10	Taking practice tests for HR certificate, in school, used O2O, ACP, Hiring Our Heroes
Participant 11	Online Student/courses, no programs used for employment but have used AER, ACS, WIC, VBS
Participant 12	Contract worker, took 4 months to find job during one PCS, took 6 months to find current job during recent PCS move, used National Military Family Association Scholarship towards licensure
Participant 13	Work remote part-time job, had job prior to PCS, used FRG, Military Recruit, ACS

Table 5 shows compiled responses from participants describing what they are satisfied and dissatisfied with in their current job, through the lens of SDT. The responses are further analyzed using the 3 basic needs of SDT, competence, relatedness, and autonomy, and grouped into either positive or negative responses. After reassembling the data, I tallied the number of responses used multiple times by different participants and placed those tallies next to their designated words and/or phrases. The flexibility and/or portability of a job, which usually came in the form of a remote position, was important to some participants. However, the downside to a remote position was the challenge of networking, not having coworkers (for some, not having any at all, while others logistically were not close to their coworkers), or not having updated information. Some participants felt that relationships with coworkers and/or the culture, environment, or population they are working with was important. Some participants discussed how feeling challenged was important to them while others stated having an interesting job or enjoying the job was important. However, sometimes the expectations or workload did not equal the monetary compensation provided.

Table 5

Positives and Negatives of SDT: Competence, Relatedness, Autonomy

	Competence	Relatedness	Autonomy
Positives	• Challenged • Enjoy job • Offered year training • Interesting	• Support/voice for military families (2x) • Like coworkers (2x) • Politics (of higher ed) • Culture/ Environment / population fantastic (3x) • Job understands military lifestyle	• Flexibility (2x) • Work/life balance • Portability • Remote work (2x)
Negatives	• Have to prove self-worth • Work load not equal to compensation • Not challenged • Expectations	• Hard to make friends • Isolating • Out of sight / out of mind • Hard to network • Hard to stay updated • Only woman in leadership • No grace or empathy from employer • No coworkers • Politics in work environment	• Lack support • Primary parent/caretaker • Spouse always gone • Employer not empathetic

Although motivation was not part of the research question, it was important to share the responses related to what motivates the participants since SDT has been used in studies of human motivation (intrinsically and extrinsically). Table 6 shows the responses

related to what has motivated participants, internally and externally, to seek employment after a PCS move. After reassembling the data in this section, I also tallied the number of responses used multiple times by different participants and placed those tallies next to their designated words and/or phrases. Having an identity or being identified as more than just a mom or spouse was just as important as having financial freedom or their own money.

Table 6

SDT: Internal and External Motivation

Motivation	
Internal	External
• Fills my bucket • Identity/more than a mom or spouse (4x) • Love it/drawn to certain occupation • Enjoy supporting military families/clients (2x) • Build relationships • Distraction (while spouse is gone) • Longing for something more/having a purpose • Independence/work for self • Hobby	• Worked hard for license/degree • Financial freedom/pay (5x) • Run program/leadership position

Table 7 shows compiled codes from participants showing their perceived self-esteem post relocation, broken down by positive and negative responses. Again, after reassembling the data, I tallied the number of responses used multiple times by different participants and placed those tallies next to their designated words and/or phrases. In this section, participants were asked about how they currently felt about their personal achievements and goals. Many participants discussed how they were proud of their academic accomplishments, some being the first to obtain an undergraduate and/or graduate degree in their family of origin. Also, participants were proud of their family unit and relationships with their spouses despite the many unique obstacles they had to face as military families. Some participants discussed being proud of their growth as an individual and having good mental health. However, many described the continuous and multiple relocation experiences as being frustrating and stressful, sometimes feeling that this was the cause of their stagnant progression occupationally. Many of the participants feel like they are the forgotten population that is taken for granted, underappreciated and stereotyped. One participant stated that even though her employer knows she is a military spouse she does not feel understood and just asks for a little grace. "I could put up with being paid the little that I'm getting paid cause I do it…but it's like I support your brother in uniform literally and he could not complete his mission. I hate to say it this way, but he cannot complete his mission without me supporting him completing his mission. And I know that you all don't give me any grace for that or any understanding for that and that's really tough, it really beats down your morale."

Table 7

Positive and Negative Responses Regarding Self-esteem

Self-Esteem	
Positives	**Negatives**
• Proud of degree/education (7x) • Proud of being a mom, family, relationship with spouse (5x) • Proud of mental health or self-growth (4x) • Jack of all trades • Rediscovery of self	• Beats down on morale • Not many achievements • Trusting ended up where I'm supposed to be • Frustrated/stressful (3x) • Feel never enough (2x) • Start over a lot • Demeaning • No career development • Moving around prevented me from doing more • Forgotten population • Taken for granted • Underappreciated • Stereotyped

Table 8 shows the responses related to challenges that participants faced post relocation regarding employment. Many participants discussed the challenges regarding pay, while others also discussed daycare and medical/healthcare issues. Participants brought up issues with being underpaid, not compensated for their workload, or not obtaining the best pay. One participant stated "my resume looks a little choppy sometimes, and then that, you know, plays a role in how much they are willing to pay

you." But another participant summed up the challenge by stating military spouses "might be conditioned not to negotiate salary". She herself had never negotiated her pay at any of her jobs not because she did not think she was worth it, but because she feels that some employers may be "predatory in nature" and take advantage of the fact that she is a military spouse and that she "should be grateful" to have a job. Also, she pointed out that employers may believe that this particular population do not need healthcare or a job since their spouse is in the military, but some families may need dual incomes since service members do not make as much as people perceive them to be earning.

Table 8

Pay and Other Various Challenges that Participants Faced Post Relocation

Challenges	
Pay	**Etc.**
• Not greatest pay • Have to pay for parking at work • Workload not equal to compensation • Paid 30% less than people out of college • Underpaid • Conditioned not to negotiate pay	• Employers are predatory in nature • Can't keep employment • Choppy resume • Daycare (lack of or expensive) • Need more remote opportunities • Healthcare issues • COVID • Locality pay cut

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To have a trustworthy study, 4 key elements need to be present, that is credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In this research study, there is evidence of trustworthiness since all 4 elements were attended to in the study using the strategies initially identified in Chapter 3.

Credibility

Credibility is achieved when data is correctly interpreted to show the participant's original viewpoint (Anney, 2014), hence in vivo coding was used to stay as close to the original thought of the participants. By using this type of coding, I was able to highlight the voices of my participants in their words (Manning, 2017), their experiences of seeking employment after relocation and their perceived self-esteem. Debriefing sessions were also used after each interview as a tool to keep track of the accuracy of data taken from the session with each participant. Accordingly, I also sought guidance from my chair and my second committee member on both the creation of the study and my analysis. Data saturation was also achieved after 13 participants were interviewed since similar information was being provided and enough data was obtained to be able to replicate the study (Fusch et al., 2015; Alam, 2019).

Transferability

In making sure my research can be utilized in other settings, hence making it transferable, I provided thick, rich descriptions in my interview transcripts by using open ended questions to acquire this type of data. Transcripts from each interview were saved using the transcription feature in the Zoom application. I also wrote detailed field notes in

my reflective journal regarding how the data was collected and any discrepancies that I encountered and how this was managed. My reflective journal was also used to keep track of my thoughts, feelings, personal biases and opinions during the interview process.

Dependability

Dependability was accomplished in this study by establishing an audit trail or triangulation. Documents used for cross checking were the interview transcripts, video footage of the interviews, raw data collected, and my reflective journal with field notes. I am confident that the research findings are consistent and repeatable, resulting in similar findings if replicated.

Confirmability

To achieve confirmability there must be a level of accuracy in interpreting the data collected from participants (Elo et al., 2014). Therefore in vivo coding was used, taking the words directly from the participants, in turn directly from the raw data. Also, reflective journaling was used to provide dependability and transferability of the study. Since the Zoom application had a transcription and video recording feature, this was used as a tool as part of establishing an audit trail. Permission from all participants were obtained to video record their interview prior to starting the recording and transcription process.

Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of U.S. female military spouses seeking employment after military relocation and their self-esteem. Using the lens of SDT as my theoretical foundation, I was able to provide clarity and answer my

research question: What are the experiences of U.S. female military spouses seeking employment after relocation due to military reassignments and their perceived self-esteem post relocation? Below I share findings from this study broken down according to the 3 basic needs of SDT: competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Furthermore, I discuss findings regarding other identified challenges by the participants, their perceived self-esteem post relocation, and discrepant cases.

SDT: Competence

Competence related to SDT is the level of skill or proficiency that an individual must complete a task (Deci & Ryan, 2000). It is also the drive to want more, learn new skills, and work towards achieving goals (Averill & Major, 2020). When an individual feels confident in performing a task and has gained mastery over the task, competence has been achieved (Coxen et al., 2021).

One participant stated her first job postgraduate and prior to her first PCS move was working for a top consulting firm where she "thought with a computer science degree I'd be able to do it from anywhere and maybe consulting programming things like that. So that was the initial plan". Unfortunately, the recruiter who had hired her did not know that the team she was hired to was "100% in residence in Atlanta, so no travel". After her first move, she obtained a job working as a nanny. "That was, that was tough. You know, I had my computer degree. I was, you know hired by one of the top 4 consulting firms, and then, you know, I went to something that didn't require my education experience or something I didn't really want to do. I just kind of fell into it as something to do." Fast forward a few more moves, she stated she obtained a job working

as a contract worker doing programming. “So that was fine. I mean, lucky. It’s lucky to have a job. You know, I’d had a yearlong employment gap.” Then after moving overseas and having their first child, she decided not to join the workforce, but did get interested in switching careers to occupational therapy due to the needs of their child and after another PCS, ended up taking prerequisites classes towards an occupational therapy degree. “So, I had to look at all the potential bases where we could go and find schools that had that program. And it actually worked out”. She was then accepted into the university at their next duty station and started her doctoral program for occupational therapy, but unexpectedly had to PCS again after completing 1 of 3 years of this program, “so that was tough”. After going through 11 PCS moves, this participant was offered a year of training at her current position, is now paid double a general schedule (GS) pay scale salary, is compensated more now than at any other previous job, is challenged, and is in an interesting line of work. “It’s not perfect but it’s the best job I’ve ever had by far.”

SDT: Relatedness

Through the lens of SDT relatedness means the need to have relationships with others and experience a sense of belonging (Ryan et al., 2000) and being a part of and important to that group (Deci et al., 1985). Relatedness provides a sense of being cared for and feeling valued and loved (Ryan & La Guardia, 2000).

One participant stated that not only does she “enjoy the job”, but also “I like my coworkers.” She stated that she also likes that her employer understands the military lifestyle. “I don’t feel bad if I say, hey my spouse has this, and I want to go cause they get it.” She feels that she is also supporting other military families where she works. “This

has been the best move." It also helps that she already had made connections with others in the community from when she was previously stationed there. Prior to this job, although she was paid better, she did not feel supported, which she equated to her employers not understanding the military lifestyle. This caused a lot of stress for her and her "mental health was not good." The only downside to her current position is that "it's not the greatest paying job."

SDT: Autonomy

Autonomy related to SDT refers to having control over one's actions (Deci et al., 1985) or perception of having their own choice over what they are attempting to do or accomplish (Averill et al., 2020; Coxen et al., 2021). One participant stated the reason why she is satisfied with her current position is because of the flexibility of the schedule. She is able to "hop off to base if I need to. The hours are really good. It allows me to spend more time with my family, which I've obviously missed out on for the last 3 years. It's allowed me to continue searching for other opportunities within school or higher education." She also states that her employer is understanding of the military lifestyle, so she is able to leave to take care of things if needed. The only drawback to her current position is that the expectation of the workload is not equal to the compensation.

Employment Status

Out of the 13 interviewed spouses, 7 are currently employed fulltime, 1 is employed parttime, 2 are unemployed, and 3 are either in school, an internship, or an apprenticeship. Of the 8 employed participants, 4 currently have remote positions, and the other 4 have in-person positions. For the participants who have remote jobs, they

report not worrying about having to change or quit their jobs due to portability. One participant attempted to stay behind with her child after her spouse relocated. However, it turned out to be exceedingly difficult for both her and her child, so she had a discussion with her employer who advised her on how to request special permission to have her position changed to a remote job. Not only did she get approval for a remote position, but she received a promotion, locality pay, training, and has since received 3 other major promotions that have led her to a director position.

The 4 participants who have in-person positions have not had the same luck as the remote workers. These participants have had significant employment gaps ranging from a few months to a few years. One participant had an in-person job that was transferable, but decided to quit because she did not like the other location. Another participant stated she was constantly applying, making calls, and going through interviews. One of the participants reported she had applied for 60 federal (GS level) jobs and ended up taking a contract job because that's what was offered.

Other Challenges

Other identified employment challenges post military relocation were issues with pay, poor employment history, childcare issues, medical issues, and locality pay issues. Three participants specifically mentioned pay being an issue at least once post relocation. One stated although she enjoys her current position, the pay is not the greatest. Another participant stated in some positions, she knew she was being paid 30% less than people out of college. Additionally, one participant voiced her concerns regarding some employers being predatory in nature, taking advantage of military spouses. She continued

to say she believes that some employers are bias in thinking that they (military spouses) do not need healthcare (because they have Tricare as a dependent) or a job (because their spouse is active duty), therefore the compensation may not always match up with the job expectations. Since some spouses may have breaks in employment, choppy resumes, or jump around a lot, they may not feel they have a say when it comes to negotiation, hence being conditioned not to negotiate salary. One spouse labeled this population as the "forgotten population" who are "underappreciated or stereotyped."

The lack of and expense of daycare was also identified as a challenge. The spouses who identified having school age and/or young children still living in their household stated childcare was an issue at least during one PCS move. Since many of them identified themselves as the primary caretaker due to their spouses' rigid schedules, it was up to them to figure out a "work life balance" if they wanted to work but had to be the primary parent. These participants reported not having support, zero flexibility, feeling "super isolating," were frustrated because they "can't see next steps," and felt like "moving around prevented me from doing more".

Perceived Self-Esteem Post Relocation

When participants were asked to describe their thoughts and feelings about their personal goals and achievements, they started to reflect on where they currently are at, what they have accomplished thus far, and how this has shaped their self-esteem. Many discussed how they were proud of their education, especially being the first in their families to have a bachelor's or master's degree. Some discussed how they were proud of being a mom, having a family, and their relationship with their spouse. Others reported

being proud of their self-growth and rediscovery of themselves due to all the moving around.

But participants also discussed the missed opportunities because of having to "start over a lot." Some participants felt like they are the "forgotten population" that is "taken for granted" and seems to be "underappreciated" and "stereotyped," which is "demeaning to self-esteem." Many voiced their frustration, and one specifically felt this type of lifestyle "beats down on morale." Three participants discussed their disappointment of not completing higher education due to military relocations. One dropped out of a specialty school, while the other two dropped out of doctoral programs. Some stated they felt like they were "never enough," that it is "really hard to have a career" and there is "no plan for career development" and "moving around prevented me from doing more".

Discrepant cases

An identified issue that was not necessarily due to military relocation but more so because of where the military installation was located was lack of medical and behavioral health resources. Since some installations are in remote or rural areas far from cities or towns, it can be a challenge to find providers to work at these installations along with find healthcare professionals off-post in the community that do not have long waitlists. Past research has reported on the significant negative impact on military spouses' healthcare due to frequent moves that cause poor continuity of care and patient-provider relationships (Gleason & Beck, 2017).

Another identified issue is making the choice to stay behind and be geographically separated from the service member. One participant stated she currently resides with her child and is geographically separated from her spouse due to their child's medical needs. The service member spouse relocated to another installation which is called unaccompanied orders. This means the service member is not accompanied by his or her family members to the next duty station.

Lack of Healthcare Availability

I came across one participant who reported having issues with obtaining medical and behavioral health appointments due to the location of where she and her family were stationed and the lack of providers on the military installation. Due to the lack of available resources for the installation, she reported being referred to the community (off post). Her wait time has been significant, which has caused poor patient care, and she has had to manage her post-partum on her own. She reported because of her current undertreated state, she is not able to maintain employment even though she misses working and would like to be part of the workforce again. This participant's report coincides with prior research stating some moves are to remote locations that have reduced access to care, and if sent out to the community, sometimes providers are ill-equipped to support this population due to lack of military competency (Borah & Fina, 2017).

Staying Behind

Another participant discussed how it was like not residing with her military spouse due to taking an unaccompanied assignment and the family deciding to stay at

their last known residence. She described her situation as a "crap situation" but has been able to fill the void by focusing on helping others in her community. She reported often she feels she must be "jack of all trades" because she has no choice since her spouse is always gone. She is the primary caretaker to their child and head of household due to her spouse receiving orders and relocating unaccompanied. She reported how it has been a challenge to find employment after losing her previous position (had resigned due to initially thinking the whole family would move) and not have support from her spouse. However, she did state that this experience has made her stronger and resourceful.

Summary

Chapter 4 provided a thorough examination of the data that was collected from the 13 interviews conducted. The setting was discussed regarding where the interviews were conducted, and demographics of the interviewed participants were shared. Information regarding steps of the data collection was provided along with the process of data analysis. Discussion of the evidence of trustworthiness was afforded, giving a description of the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study. Finally, results of the research study were shared, using the basis of SDT to answer the posed research question: What are the experiences of U.S. female military spouses seeking employment after relocation due to military reassignments and their perceived self-esteem post relocation?

The overall answer to this research question is that no one experience is the same between participants or even with the same participant. Every PCS move is different from the next and should be treated as such. There are certain factors that do help make the

transition of moving a bit easier for military spouses. One being remote versus in-person jobs. Participants who had remote jobs had the luxury of not having to worry about finding employment at their next duty station since their job was portable. A common theme among the participants was wanting a bit more grace, understanding, and empathy from employers regarding their situation as a military family (i.e., issues that go along with being sole caretaker of household). These spouses have also sacrificed their aspirations on a personal and professional level. One participant commented that she feels "frustrated" and is "trusting that I've ended up where I'm supposed to be." She stated at one point she had to make a choice, either "be with my spouse or give up my job."

In chapter 5, I will further discuss the interpretation of the data collected and how this relates to the literature that was highlighted in chapter 2. Further examination regarding the implications for this population and social change will be discussed. Recommendations for key stakeholders and future studies will also be presented.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore the experiences of U.S. female military spouses seeking employment after relocations due to military reassignments and their perceived self-esteem post relocation. This study was conducted to contribute to existing literature regarding this phenomenon and to explore U.S. female military spouses' views of their self-esteem post relocation. The study of military spouses is not a new one. However, the gap in literature that was further explored in this research study was the exploration of U.S. female military spouses' self-esteem post relocation.

Interpretation of the Findings

Not All PCS Moves are the Same

Findings from this study show there is no one overarching experience when it comes to military relocations for spouses. A spouse may have no issues during one PCS move but have a horrible experience during another move. There are so many factors that play a role in what type of experience each spouse will have. For instance, moving with just your spouse versus moving with your spouse and children or moving across state lines versus moving across the country. Other issues that were brought up were childcare, lack of support system, lack of opportunities due to location, COVID, and racism.

Portability and flexibility of a job and person are important key factors in determining the likelihood of whether a spouse will be employed at their next duty station or how long it may take to find employment. Many of the participants reported feeling frustrated and hoping that the end result is where they are supposed to be. This coincides with prior research by Rowsen et al. (2021) and Roderick (2012) related to trailing

spouses. As previously discussed, trailing spouses are predominantly women or the wives of the house, who sacrifice their personal and professional goals to follow their spouse to keep their nuclear family intact. They usually find themselves becoming the primary caretaker of the family while placing their identities outside of being spouse and parent on hold. Many participants in this study discussed the importance of having an identity outside of just being a mom, spouse, or even a military spouse/dependent. This was one of the reasons provided as motivation to continue searching for employment post PCS move.

Although many spouses discussed the sacrifices (both professional and personal) they have had to make due to military relocation, they have all looked at the experiences through a positive lens and have made the best out of their circumstances. In previous research, McNulty and Moeller (2018) had identified 4 categories of a trailing spouse: ready, re-born, resentful, and resigned. Many of the participants in this study were either ready or re-born. The ready participants refused to allow a PCS move to defeat their will to move forward with their personal and/or professional goals, whether that meant continuing courses for a graduate degree or working in an occupation that they really enjoyed. The re-born participants reinvented themselves (i.e., obtain new degree or certification; find internship or apprenticeship in new occupational field) post relocation and were creative enough to position themselves to be successful.

It is Hard Finding Employment Post Relocation

Results from this research study supported findings from Burke and Miller's study (2018), which stated that pay reduction and termination of earnings due to military

relocation can impact a spouse for up to 3 years after a move. Data taken from the Office of People Analytics (2019) state that 35% of military spouses took at least 7 months or more to find employment after a PCS. A common theme among all the spouses interviewed was their struggle to find employment during at least 1 of their PCS moves. Participants ranged from 2.5 months to 1 year of searching and interviewing for jobs post relocation. Some stayed unemployed and became stay at home moms, while others were fortunate enough to find remote positions. One participant had a 15 year professional gap before finding a remote position. Her persistence and perseverance maneuvering through various obstacles (i.e., switching degrees and employment field) was the reason for her success, like many other spouses that were interviewed.

Using SDT to Explain How Loss of Employment Affects Military Spouses in Terms of the Three Basic Psychological Needs

Achievements and reported successes by these participants can be further explained using the lens of SDT. According to SDT, the universal need that crosses all races, cultures, and ethnicities (Ryan & Deci, 2000) is the need to feel competence, relatedness, and autonomy on an ongoing basis to achieve well-being (Ryan & La Guardia, 2000). According to Gribble et al. (2019), employment among military spouses provides structure, a sense of purpose, status within the community, and social connections outside of the military. Findings from this study support this theoretical foundation since many participants discussed their jobs being a source of their identity, having autonomy over their program (place of work), having independence, having financial freedom, and feeling connected with others (within military community and

other populations) by supporting them in a professional capacity. This was the driving force for the spouses to either continue working or seek employment post relocation.

Perceived Self-Esteem Post Relocation

According to Alka and Midha (2015), employment and education impacts a female's level of confidence and self-esteem, which in-turn promotes positive and balanced well-being. Findings from this study corroborate this statement since all participants reported leaning on employment, education, or both at some point during their spouse's military career not necessarily for financial support but more so for a morale boost. Many of the spouses that participated in this study are highly educated women who stated they worked hard for their degrees and professional license. Many participants stated feeling frustrated regarding where their career is currently at and felt that their current state or status was demeaning to their self-esteem.

Some spouses stated they feel like a forgotten population, which are underappreciated or stereotyped. Due to relocating every few years, all spouses stated oftentimes they must start over, and sometimes this makes them feel that they are not enough or doing enough. Some stated they are trusting that they ended up where they are supposed to be. While others stated they had to make a choice of whether they wanted to be married or have a career. But in the end, all participants discussed how proud they are of themselves and their spouses. They point out that through these challenges they have personally grown and become stronger as a family unit.

Limitations of the Study

Participants for this study were U.S. female military spouses. This excluded male military spouses, spouses of veterans, reservists, and national guard. Also, the participants had to be currently married to U.S. active duty service members, so this excluded spouses outside the U.S. and significant others who are not married to the service member. It is arguable that the data from this study is not gender neutral since the focus is specific to females, and not transferable to other populations like spouses of veterans. Also, all the spouses were heterosexual couples, which was by chance and was not preset.

The method of recruitment for this study can also be considered a limitation since it may have unintentionally targeted a specific type of population. Social media (i.e., Career Military Spouses Facebook group) and word-of-mouth (i.e., friends, family, networking) via snowball sampling were the specific methodology used to recruit participants. All the participants ended up being educated, career oriented (at least at some point in their life) individuals, which may affect the transferability of the results due to potential skewing of responses.

Also, potential researcher bias may have influenced how participants responded to the interview questions. Having knowledge of the subject matter being studied may have biased interpretation of data collected. As the researcher, I may have missed nonverbal cues due to conducting all interviews via Zoom, which is an online platform versus in-person interviews. Having to rely on transcripts from the Zoom platform is not always

reliable. However, coupled with video recordings and my reflective journal, it provides better chances of being as accurate as possible.

Recommendations

Further recommendations for future studies regarding this subject matter are to extend the population being studied. For example, to male spouses, spouses residing outside the U.S., significant others not married to active duty service members, same-sex couples, spouses of veterans, reservists, and national guard. Also, provide in-person interviews versus utilizing an online platform to provide a more personable and accurate account regarding making notation of the nonverbal cues.

Also, it would be beneficial to further examine what options are available regarding portable and flexible jobs since this was mentioned as being an important factor in finding employment by many participants. With advances in technology and the push to move school curriculums and jobs online (due to COVID, cost efficiency, etc.), looking into how to connect military spouses with remote positions and/or programs that will help support them in finding these types of jobs would be valuable. Along with this, being more transparent regarding actual utilization by military spouses of existing programs on and off post, non-profit and government funded organizations, would help determine what is over and underutilized. There were a few participants who made comments related to either not knowing what programs were offered or not feeling that the resource was helpful overall.

Additional research related to military spouses and how military relocation affects all aspects of their life is needed since much of the historical research is either outdated,

geared towards the civilian population (i.e., trailing spouses), are not specific to the U.S. military branches, or quantitative in nature. This study is a good starting point for future researchers. However, more data is needed to better understand the needs of this unique population, which will improve the focus of current and future programs for military spouses.

Implications for Social Change

This study has the potential impact for positive social change at both the macro and micro level. First, the hope is that this study will help generate discussions and recommendations among key stakeholders regarding the need to further develop policies, procedures, and programs to support military spouses in obtaining employment after a military relocation. The hope is to improve and encourage positive self-esteem among military spouses with the potential of positively impacting retention among active duty service members. Identified key stakeholders would be government officials within and outside of the DoD to local non-profits whose mission statement is to help the military population. Also, to further examine existing programs that are geared towards helping military spouses and create standardized reporting requirements that would make data collection and results more visible and transparent to all involved. Lastly, to provide quality and accurate support to military spouses, focusing on what matters to them and their needs, enhancing their overall quality of life.

Conclusion

This study confirms findings from prior research suggesting that military relocation does negatively impact military spouses' careers. Whether it is through

disruption of employment or loss of employment, and lack of career progression or obtaining senior status, it does make a significant impact especially over time and multiple relocations. Previous literature has stated that employment provides spouses with a sense of pride and accomplishment, surpassing the monetary value of a job. This study confirms past literature in that majority of participants discussed the benefits of employment being more than just financial stability but also having a sense of purpose, following personal passions, and having an identity outside of just a spouse.

The military is not just a job, but it is a lifestyle. It not only affects the service member, but the whole family unit. Military spouses are the backbones of this unit. They are the ones who not only support their service member spouses, but also are the primary caretakers of the children and their household. These spouses are what one participant described as "jack of all trades." But military spouses want to be known for more than just being a spouse, they also want to have an identity outside of the military. They too had a life filled with dreams and ambitions prior to joining the military with their active duty spouses. Unfortunately, many of these dreams have had to be placed on hold or completely abandoned as a whole.

New active duty service members reporting to their first duty station are usually provided a sponsor so why not have a service like this for the military spouses. This would be beneficial especially for new military spouses coming into the lifestyle not having any prior knowledge or for spouses going overseas for the first time. Also, having an embedded program within each installation that is focused on supporting military spouses find employment specifically at their next duty station would be beneficial and

help reduce the stress and anxiety that naturally comes with each PCS move. Extending an invitation for spouses to participate in the in-processing procedure at each gaining installation would also be helpful not just because it would provide information about programs and resources available but also to help spouses feel included, cared for, and important to the military. These are all suggestions, speaking from experience, to hopefully better the overall health and wellbeing for the whole military family unit.

References

Alam, M. K. (2019). A systematic qualitative case study: questions, data collection, nvivo analysis and saturation. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal, 16*(1), 1-31. DOI: 10.1108/QROM-09-2019-1825.

Alka, & Midha, Punam. (2015). Employment: An indicator of self-esteem among women. *Indian Journal of Positive Psychology, 6*(4), 451-452.

Anderson, C. (2010). Presenting and evaluating qualitative research. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education, 74*(8), 1-7.

Anney, V. N. (2014). Ensuring the quality of the findings of qualitative research: Looking at trustworthiness criteria. *Journal of emerging trends in educational research and policy studies, 5*(2), 272-281.

Averill, R. M., & Major, J. (2020). What motivates higher education educators to innovate? Exploring competence, autonomy, and relatedness – and connections with wellbeing. *Educational Research, 62*(2), 146-161, https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2020.1755877.

Bakhurst, M. G., Loew, B., McGuire, A. C. L., Halford, W. K., & Markman, H. J. (2017). Relationship education for military couples: Recommendations for best practice. *Family Practice, 56*, 302-316. DOI: 10.111/famp.12211.

Baksh, B. (2018). To bracket or not to bracket: Reflections of a novice qualitative researcher. *Reflections, 24*(3), 45-55.

The National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research. (1979). *Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines*

for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research. https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/sites/default/files/the-belmont-report-508c_FINAL.pdf

Bengtsson, M. (2016). How to plan and perform a qualitative study using content analysis. *NursingPlus Open, 2,* 8-14. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.npls.2016.01.001.

Bernard, R. H. (2012). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches (2nd ed.).* Sage.

Biglia, B., & Marti,J. B. (2014). Precarity. *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology*. https://doi.org/10/1007/978-1-4614-5583-7_230.

Blaisure, K. R., Saathoff-Wells, T., Pereira, A., Wadsworth, S. M., & Dombro, A. L. (2016). *Serving Military Families: Theories, Research, and Application (2nd ed.).* Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Blakely, B., Hennessy, C., Chung, M. C., & Skirton, H. (2014). The impact of foreign postings on accompanying military spouses: An ethnographic study. *Health Psychology Research, 2*(1468). DOI: 10.4081/hpr.2014.1468.

Blue Star Families Military Family Lifestyle Survey. (2018). Comprehensive Report.

Blue Star Families Military Family Lifestyle Survey. (2020). Comprehensive Report.

Boddy, C. R. (2016). Sample size for qualitative research. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal, 19*(4), 426-432.

Borah, E., & Fina, B. (2017). Military spouses speak up: A qualitative study of military and veteran spouses' perspectives. *Journal of Family Social Work, 20*(2), 144-161. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10522158.2017.1284702

Burke, J., & Miller, A. R. (2018). The effects of job relocation on spousal careers:

Evidence from military change of station moves. *Economic Inquiry, 56*(2), 1261-1277. DOI: 10.1111/ecin.12529

Burrell, L. M., Adams, G. A., Durand, D. B., & Castro, C. A. (2006). The impact of military lifestyle demands on well-being, army, and family outcomes. *Armed Forces & Society, 33*(1), 43-58.

Candela, A. (2019). Exploring the function of member checking. *Qualitative Report, 24*(3), 619-628. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2019.3726.

Cangia, F. (2018). Precarity, imagination, and the mobile life of the 'trailing spouse'. *Ethos, 46*(1), 8-26. DOI: 10.1111/etho.12195.

Castaneda, L. W., & Harrell, M. C. (2008). Military spouse employment: A grounded theory approach to experiences and perceptions. *Armed Forces & Society, 34*(3), 389-412. DOI: 10.1177/0095327X07307194.

Chenail, R.J. (2011). Interviewing the investigator: Strategies for addressing instrumentation and researcher bias concerns in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report, 16*(1), 255-262.

Church, A. T., Katigbak, M. S., Locke, K. D., Zhang, H., Shen, J., Vargas-Flores, J. D. J., Ibanez-Reyes, J., Tanaka-Matsumi, J., Curtis, G. J., Cabrera, H. F., Mastor, K. A., Alvarez, J. M., Ortiz, F. A., Simon, J. R., & Ching, C. M. (2012). Need satisfaction and well-being: Testing self-determination theory in eight cultures. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 44*(4), 507-534.

Clark, M. G., Jordan, J. D., & Clark, K. L. (2013). Motivating military families to thrive. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal, 42*(2), 110-123, DOI:

10.1111/fcsr.12046.

Congressional Research Service (2020). *Military Spouse Employment*. https://crsreports.congress.gov

Cooke, T. J., & Speirs, K. (2005). Migration and employment among the civilian spouses of military personnel. *Social Science Quarterly, 86*(2), 343-355.

Copeland, A. P., & Norrell, S. K. (2002). Spousal adjustment on international assignments: The role of social support. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 26*, 255-272. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0147-1767(02)00003-2

Corry, N. H., Radakrishnan, S., Williams, C. S., Sparks, A. C., Woodall, K. A., Fairbank, J. A., & Stander, V. A. (2019). Association of military life experiences and health indicators among military spouses. *BMC Public Health, 19*(1517), 1-14. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-019-7804-z.

The Council of Economic Advisers. (2018, May). Military Spouses in the Labor Market.

Coxen, L., van der Vaart, L., Van den Broeck, A., & Rothmann, S. (2021). Basic psychological needs in the work context: A systematic literature review of diary studies. *Systematic Review, 12*, 1-18.

Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice, 39*, 124-130. http://dx.oi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip3903_2

Creswell, J. W., & Path, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches (4th ed.)*. Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research (2nd ed.)*. Sage Publications, Los Angeles. da

Crouch, C. L., Adrian, A. L., Adler, A. B., Wood, M. D., & Thomas, J. L. (2016). Military spouses stationed overseas: Role of social connectedness on health and well-being. *Military Behavioral Health, 0*(0), 1-8. http://dx.doi/org/10.1080/21635781.2016.1272014.

Danford, C. A. (2023). Understanding the evidence: Qualitative research designs. *Urologic Nursing, 43*(1), 41-45. https://doi.org/10.7257/2168-4626.2023.43.1.41

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior*. Springer New York, NY. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4899-2271-7

De Araujo, P. F. (2021). The applicability of self-determination theory for cross-cultural coaching: A study with assigned and self-initiated expatriates. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 96-109.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 1-32.

Dibley, L. (2011). Analyzing narrative data using mccormack's lenses. *Nurse Researcher, 18*(3). DOI: 10.7748/nr2011.04.18.3.13.c8458

DoD Demographics Report. (2020). DMDC Active Duty Military Personnel Master File. https://dwp.dmdc.osd.mil/dwp/app/dod-data-reports/workforce-reports

Du, H., King, R. B., & Chi, P. (2017). Self-esteem and subjective well-being revisited: The roles of personal, relational, and collective self-esteem. *PLoS ONE, 12*(8). https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0183958

Eby, L. T. (2001). The boundryless career experiences of mobile spouses in dual-earner

marriages. *Group & Organization Management, 26*(3), 343-368.

Elliott, B. (2019). Examining sojourner's adjustment, transition, and cultural identity: A military spouse's perspective moving to Italy. *Journal of Cultural Diversity, 26*(4), 121-127.

Elliott, B. (2020). US military spouses' experiences transitioning abroad: A narrative analysis. *Nursing Forum, 55*, 703-710, DOI: 10.1111/nuf.12487.

Elo, S., Kaariainen, M., Kanste, O., Polkki, T., Utriainen, K., & Kyngas, H. (2014). Qualitative content analysis: A focus on trustworthiness. *SAGE Open*, 1-10, DOI: 10.1177/2158244014522633.

Fields, D. A., & Kafai, Y. B. (2009). A connective ethnography of peer knowledge sharing and diffusion in a tween virtual world. *International Journal of Computer Supported Collaborative Learning, 4*(1), 47-68.

Fradkin-Hayslip, A. (2021). Teacher autonomy, motivation, and job satisfaction: Perceptions of elementary school teachers according to self-determination theory. *Ilkogretim Online – Elementary Education Online, 20*(2), 198-205, DOI: 10.17051/ilkonline.2021.02.25.

Fusch, P. I., & Ness, L. R. (2015). Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report, 20*(9), 1408-1416. http://www.nova/edu/ssss/QR/QR20/9/fusch.1.pdf.

Gagne, M., & Deci, E. L. (2005). Self-determination theory and work motivation. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 26*, 331-362. DOI: 10.1002/job.322.

GAO-19-320R: My Career Advancement Account. (2019). Military Spouse

Employment: Participation in an Efforts to Promote the My Career Advancement Account Program. www.gao.gov

GAO-13-60: Military Spouse Employment Programs. (2012, December). DOD Can Improve Guidance and Performance Monitoring. www.gao.gov

Gleason, J. L., & Beck, K. H. (2017). Examining associations between relocation, continuity of care, and patient satisfaction in military spouses. *Military Medicine, 182*, 1657-1664.

Godier-McBard, L. R., Caddick, N., & Fossey, M. (2020). Confident, valued and supported: Examining the benefits of employment support for military spouses. *Military Psychology*, *32*(3), 273-286, https://doi.org/10.1080/08995605.2020.1731251.

Gomez-Baya, D., & Lucia-Casademunt, A. M. (2018). A self-determination theory approach to health and well-being in the workplace: Results from the sixth European working conditions survey in spain. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *48*, 269-283, DOI: 10.1111/jasp.12511.

Gribble, R., Goodwin, L., Oram, S., & Fear, N. T. (2019). 'It's nice to just be you': The influence of the employment experiences of UK military spouses during accompanied postings on well-being. *Health Psychology Open*, 1-10. DOI: 10.1177/2055102919838909.

Gudmundsdottir, S., Gudlaugsson, T. O., & Adalsteinsson, G. D. (2018). The diplomatic spouse: Relationships between adjustment, social support and satisfaction with life. *Journal of Global Mobility, 7*(1), 103-122, DOI:10.1108/JGM-09-2018-0043.

Hadden, B. W., & Smith, C. V. (2017). I gotta say, today was a good (and meaningful) day: Daily meaning in life as a potential basic psychological need. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 20*, 185-202, https://doi.org/10.1007/x10902-017-9946-y.

Hosek, J., & Wadsworth, S. M. (2013). Economic conditions of military families. *Journal of Economics, 23*(2), 41-59.

Huffman, A. H., Dunbar, N., Billington, A. G., & Howes, S. S. (2019). Soldiers' perceptions of military spouses' career experiences. *Military Psychology, 31*(6), 510-522. https://doi.org/10.1080/08995605.2019.1676601.

Jacob, S. A., & Furgerson, S. P. (2012). Writing interview protocols and conducting interviews: Tips for students new to the field of qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report, 17*(42), 1-10. http://www.nova.edu/sss/QR/QR17/jacob.pdf

Kuykendall, L., Craig, L., & Tay, L. (2020). Work-contingent self-esteem: A boon or bane for worker well-being? *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 41*, 1-16. DOI: 10.1002/job.2408.

Lin, S., Chang, C., Lee, H. W., & Johnson, R. E. (2021). Positive family events facilitate effective leader behaviors at work: A within-individual investigation of family-work environment. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 106*(9), 1412-1434. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/ap10000827

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Sage Publications.

Locke, E. A., & Schattke, K. (2019). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation: Time for expansion and clarification. *Motivation Science, 5*(4), 277-290.

McBride, P., & Cleymans, L. (2014). A paradigm shift: Strategies for assisting military

spouses in obtaining a successful career path. *Career Planning and Adult Development Journal*, 92-102.

McMahon, S. A., & Winch, P. J. (2018). Systematic debriefing after qualitative encounters: An essential analysis step in applied qualitative research. BMJ Global Health, 3, 1-6. DOI: 10.1136/bmjgh-2018-000837

McNulty, Y., & Moeller, M. (2018). *A typology of dual-career expatriate (trailing) spouses: The 'r' profile*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-76529-7_10.

Mailey, E. L., Mershon, C., Joyce, J., & Irwin, B. C. (2018). "Everything else comes first": a missed-methods analysis of barriers to health behaviors among military spouses. *BMC Public Health*, 1-11.

Manning, J. (2017). In vivo coding. *The international encyclopedia of communication research methods.* New York, NY: Wiley-Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118901731.iecrm0270

Martela, F., & Sheldon, K. M. (2019). Clarifying the concept of well-being: Psychological need satisfaction as the common core connecting eudaimonic and subjective well-being. *Review of General Psychology, 23*(4), 458-474. DOI: 10.1177/1089268019880886.

Mason, M. (2010). Sample size and saturation in phd studies using qualitative interviews. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 11*(3).

Meadows, S. O., Griffin, B. A., Karney, B. R., & Pollak, J. (2016). Employment gaps between military spouses and matched civilians. *Armed Forces & Society, 42*(3),

542-561. DOI: 10.1177/0095327X15607810.

Monteiro, R. P., Coelho, G. L. D. H., Hanel, P. H., de Medeiros, E. D., & da Silva, P. D. G. (2022). The efficient assessment of self-esteem: proposing the brief rosenberg self-esteem scale. *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, *17*(2), 931-947. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-021-09936-4

Motulsky, S. L. (2021). Is member checking the gold standard of quality in qualitative research? *Qualitative Psychology*, *8*(3), 389-406. https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000215.

Mutter, J. (2017). The global mobility decisions of professional sailors spouses. *Journal of Global Mobility*. DOI: 10.1108/JGM-08-2016-0035.

Noy, C. (2008). Sampling knowledge: The hermeneutics of snowball sampling in qualitative research. *Int. J. Social Research Methodology, 11*(4), 327-344.

Office of People Analytics. (2019). 2019 Survey of Active Duty Spouses (2019 ADSS). Spouse Military Support, Education, Employment, and Financial Status, Deployment and Reintegration, Spouse and Child Well-being.

Office of People Analytics. (2020). 2020 Status of Forces Survey of Active Duty Member (SOFS-A). Leading Indicators Briefing: Retention, Satisfaction, Tempo, Stress, and Readiness. https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Surveys/2020-Status-of-Forces-Active-Duty-Briefing.pdf

O'Neal, C. W., Mancini, J. A., & Bowen, G. L. (2020). Connecting experiences of community shared responsibility and collective competence to the well-being of

adults in military families. *Journal of Community Psychology, 48,* 1637-1650.

Ortlipp, M. (2008). Keeping and using reflective journals in the qualitative research process. *The qualitative report, 13*(4), 695-705.

Owen, R., & Combs, T. (2017). Caring for military families: Understanding their unique stressors. *The Nurse Practitioner, 42*(5), 26-32.

Padden, D., & Posey, S. (2013). Caring for military spouses in primary care. *Journal of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners, 25*, 141-146.

Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Adm Policy Ment Health, 42*(5), 533-544.

Park, N. (2011). Military children and families: Strengths and challenges during peace and war. American Psychologist, 66(1), 65-72. DOI: 10.1037/a0021249

Patton, M. Q. (2002). Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods (3rd ed.). Sage Publications; Thousand Oaks, CA.

Percy, W. H., Kostere, K., & Kostere, S. (2015). Generic qualitative research in psychology. *The qualitative report, 20*(2), 76-85.

Polit, D. F., & Beck, C. T. (2010). Generalization in quantitative and qualitative research: Myths and strategies. International Journal of Nursing Studies, 47, 1451-1458. DOI: 10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2010.06.004

Ribeiro, S. Renshaw, K. D., & Allen, E. S. (2023). Military-related relocation and stress and psychological distress in military partners. Journal of Family Psychology, 37(1), 45-53 https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0001030

Roderick, M. (2012). An unpaid labor of love: Professional footballers, family life, and the problem of job relocation. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 36*(3), 317-338.

Rowsen, T. S., Meyer, A., & Houldsworth, E. (2021). Work identity pause and reactivation: A study of cross-domain identity transitions of trailing wives in dubai. *Work, Employment and Society, 00*(0), 1-18.

Runge, C. E., Waller, M., MacKenzie, A., & McGuire, A. C. L. (2014). Spouses of military members' experiences and insights: Qualitative analysis of responses to an open-ended question in a survey of health and wellbeing. *PLoS One, 9*(12), 1-18. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0114755.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 68-78, DOI: 10.1037//0003-066X.55.1.68.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2001). To be happy or to be self-fulfilled: A review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. *Annual Review of Psychology, 52*, 141-166.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2004). *Handbook of Self-Determination Research*. University of Rochester Press. Rochester, NY.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2017). *Self-Determination Theory: Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development, and Wellness.* The Guilford Press. New York, NY.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E., L. (2019). Brick by brick: The origins, development, and future of self-determination theory.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2020). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: Definitions, theory, practices, and future directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 61*, 1-11.

Ryan, R. M., Deci, E. L., Vansteenkiste, M., & Soenens, B. (2021). Building a science of motivated persons: Self-determination theory's empirical approach to human experience and the regulation of behavior. *Motivation Science, 7*(2), 97-110. https://doi.org/10.1037/mot0000194.

Ryan, R. M., & La Guardia, J. G. (2000). What is being optimized? Self-determination theory and basic psychological needs. Psychology and the Aging Revolution: How We Adapt to Longer Life. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/10363-008

Sansone, C., & Tang, Y. (2021). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and self-determination theory. *Motivation Science, 7*(2), 113-114. https://doi.org/10.1037/mot0000234.

Schading, B. (2007). *A Civilian's Guide to the U.S. Military: A Comprehensive Reference to the Customs, Language, & Structure of the Armed Forces*. Penguin Random House LLC.

Shin, Y., Hur, W., Moon, T. W., & Lee, S. (2019). A motivational perspective on job insecurity: Relationships between job insecurity, intrinsic motivation, and performance and behavioral outcomes. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 16*, 1-16, DOI: 10.3390/ijerph16101812.

Slobodin, O. (2019). "Out of time": A temporal view on identity change in trailing spouses. *Time & Society, 28*(4), 1489-1508, DOI: 10.1177/0961463X17752283.

Sorsa, M., Kiikkala, I., & Astedt-Kurki, P. (2015). Bracketing as a skill in conducting

unstructured qualitative interviews. *Nurse Researcher, 22*(4), 8-12.

Spencer, E., Page, K., & Clark, M. G. (2016). Managing frequent relocation in families? Considering prospect theory, emotional framing, and priming. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal, 45*(1), 77-90.

Sullivan, K. S., Hawkins, S. A., Gilreath, T. D., & Castro, C. A. (2021). Mental health outcomes associated with profiles of risk and resilience among U.S. army spouses. *Journal of Family Psychology, 35*(1), 33-43.

Trewick, N., & Muller, J. (2014). Unemployment in military spouses: An examination of the latent and manifest benefits, quality of life, and psychological wellbeing. *Australian Journal of Career Development, 23*(2), 47-56. DOI: 10.1177/1038416213520306.

United States Government Accountability Office Report to Congressional Committees. (2012). Military Spouse Employment Programs: DOD Can Improve Guidance and Performance Monitoring.

United states government accountability office. (2021). Military spouse employment: DOD should continue assessing state licensing practices and increase awareness of resources. GAO-21-193: Military Spouse Employment.

Wang, Z. & Pullman, L. E. (2019). Impact of military lifestyle on employment status and income among female civilian spouses of Canadian armed forces members. *Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health, 5*(1), 54-62, DOI:10.3138/jmvfh.5.s1.2018-0025.

Webber, E., & Vogel, A. J. (2019). The preparation, training and support requirements of

expatriate trailing spouses. *South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences, 22*(1), 2222-3436. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajems.v22i1.2703.

Weinstein N., & Stone, D. N. (2018). Need depriving effects of financial insecurity: Implications for well-being and financial behaviors. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 147*(10), 1503-1520, http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/xge0000436.

Yilmaz, K. (2013). Comparison of quantitative and qualitative research traditions: Epistemological, theoretical, and methodological differences. European Journal of Education: Research, Development and Policy, 48(2), 311-325. https://doi.org/10.1111/ejed.12014

Yin, R. (2013). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Sage, Thousand Oaks, California.

Zeijen, M. E., Petrou, P., Bakker, A. B., & van Gelderen, B. R. (2020). Dyadic support exchange and work engagement: An episodic test and expansion of self-determination theory. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 93*, 687-711. DOI: 10.1111/joop.12311.

Ziff, E., & Garland-Jackson, F. (2020). "I'm not your 'typical' military wife": The construction of gender and agency through stereotypes. *Armed Forces & Society, 46*(3), 376-396, DOI: 10.1177/0095327X19875488.

Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

Interview study seeks US Female Military Spouses

There is a new study called *"US Female Military Spouses' Experiences of Careers and Self-Esteem After Frequent Military Relocations"* seeking to explore US female military spouses' experiences of seeking employment after military relocation and their perceived self-esteem. For this study, you are invited to describe your experiences looking for employment after a military reassignment.

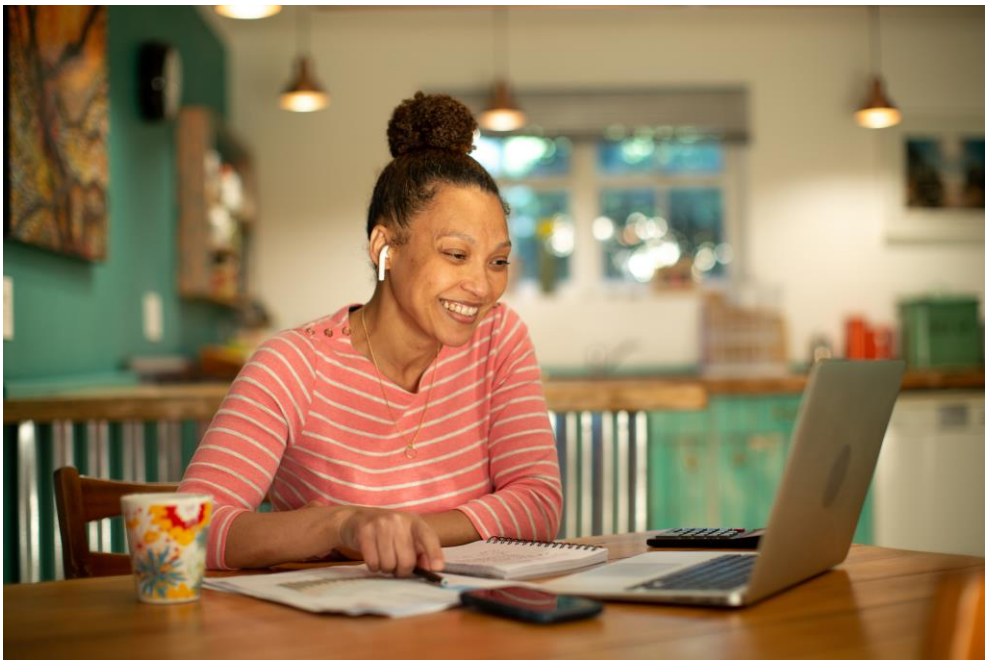
Are you:
A woman married to an active-duty military service person?
Have you relocated at least once due to your partner's military transfer or assignment?

This research is part of the doctoral study for Jennifer Gonzalez, a Ph.D. student at Walden University. Walden University's approval number for this study is 10-30-23-0736717.

You are invited to:

- Participate in a 45-minute interview via Zoom in a private location of your choice (non-military setting).
- Interviews will be recorded via Zoom video conferencing tool recording feature.
- The interviews are confidential, and your name or identity will not be included in the study.

To volunteer, please email the researcher



Appendix B: Criteria Form

Criteria Questions

1. What is your gender?
2. Are you currently married to an active duty service member in the U.S. military?
3. Have you gone through at least one PCS (permanent change of station) move while married to an active duty service member?

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

I. Introduce myself in a way that will build rapport.

II. Verify receipt and understanding of consent to participate in the study and answer any questions or concerns to build rapport and trust.

III. Get confirmation and acknowledgement that the interview will be recorded.

IV. Briefly state the purpose of the study and interview.

V. Start the interview with question number one and follow through to the final question.

VI. On the participant's request, paraphrase the interview questions as needed.

VII. Ask follow-up probing questions as needed.

VIII. End the interview and thank the participant for participating in the study.

IX. Confirm the participant has contact information for follow-up questions and/or concerns.

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been married?
2. Branch of service?
3. Highest grade completed?
4. What were you doing for work when you met your current spouse?
5. What did you want to do for a career before you met your spouse?
6. Do any other individuals live with you? What is your household size?
7. How many PCS moves have you been involved with your spouse?
8. How many PCS moves has your spouse done?

9. Tell me a little bit about each move; the positives and negatives of the move. Did you like moving from X to Y? What was difficult about the move, if any?
10. Tell me a little bit about what you do now?
11. If employed, how long did it take you to find employment after this last PCS? How does this compare to other PCS moves?
12. What has been your experience working with any military related programs/assistance that help military spouses find employment? If so, was it helpful? If not used, why not? What other programs are you aware of?
13. What are some things you are satisfied with in your current employment? What is your desired field of work?
14. What are some things, if any, you are dissatisfied with in your current employment?
15. If employed, what motivates you to continue working?
16. If not employed outside the home or working part time what is satisfying for you about this?
17. Tell me a little about your personal goals?
18. Can you tell me about how you feel about your own achievements?
19. Is there anything else you feel I should know about you, or you think would be beneficial for me to know regarding the research I'm conducting?

Appendix D: Debrief Discussion Post-Interview

Thank you for your participation in our study! Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Purpose of the Study:
I previously informed you that the purpose of this study is to gather data to explore experiences of US female military spouses' seeking employment after relocation due to military reassignments and perceived self-esteem post relocation.

Final Report:
If you would like to receive a summary of the findings when it is completed, I can send it to your email address. Would you like to see the findings?

Useful Contact Information:
If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, its purpose, or procedures, or if you have a research-related problem, please feel free to contact me

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact Walden University's Research Participant Advocate at 612-312-1210.