

RETENTION

In 2003 DACOWITS was asked by the DoD to address retention among female active duty officers. This topic was carried over into the 2004 report. The 2003 DMDC figures continue to support the 2002 figures that female active duty officers are more likely than male officers to separate from service during the early stages of their careers. (Appendix 1). This report summarizes the comments of male and female service personnel and their families who participated in focus groups at military installations. It also reviews recent survey research and literature focusing on women's retention in both the military and the civilian workforce, and identifies emergent trends in these areas. The chapter is presented in the following sections:

- FOCUS GROUPS RESULTS: CURRENT CAREER INTENTIONS AND FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CAREER DECISION
- FOCUS GROUPS RESULTS: WORKING IN ORIGINAL CAREER FIELD
- FOCUS GROUP RESULTS: RETAINING THOSE WITH HIGH DEMAND MILITARY SKILLS
- RESEARCH FINDINGS: SEPARATION RATES, CAREER INTENTIONS AND FINDINGS FROM THE CIVILIAN LITERATURE
- FOCUS GROUP RESULTS: UNIT CLIMATE'S IMPACT ON RETENTION
- RESEARCH FINDINGS: PERCEPTIONS OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCEMENT
- RESEARCH FINDINGS: WOMEN'S CIVILIAN WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION AND FACTORS AFFECTING THEIR RETENTION
- ORGANIZATIONAL BEST PRACTICES IN THE CIVILIAN SECTOR

The chapter concludes with a brief summary. Each section is presented below.

I. FOCUS GROUPS RESULTS: CURRENT CAREER INTENTIONS AND FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CAREER DECISION

Career Intentions. DACOWITS began their focus group questions by asking Service members if they intended to stay in the military, leave the military, or were undecided. Similarly, family group participants were asked to identify the intentions of their military family member. Typically, focus groups contained a mixture of individuals, some of whom intended to stay, some who were leaving, and some who were undecided.

Among focus groups in which this question was posed, Table 1 shows that all of the focus groups conducted in 2004 contained Service members who intended to continue their military careers, or family members who reported their spouse intended to stay. About three-fifths (57%) of groups contained participants who intended to leave, or who reported their spouses intended to

leave. More than two-thirds (69%) of the 2004 groups contained participants who were undecided, or who reported their spouse was undecided.

Table 1: Career intentions in 2004 DACOWITS focus groups*

Response	Number and percent of groups in which response was recorded (n=65)	
Intend to stay	65	100%
Intend to leave	37	57%
Undecided	45	69%

Note: numbers and percentages refer to groups and not to individuals.

Table 2 presents the intentions recorded within DACOWITS focus groups held in 2003. As the table indicates, there was a similar percentage of groups in both years that contained “stayers” (98%) and “leavers” (59%). Compared to 2004, a slightly smaller percentage of groups in 2003 (56%) contained undecided participants.

Table 2: Career intentions in 2003 DACOWITS focus groups

Response	Number and percent of groups in which response was recorded (n=61)	
Intend to stay	60	98%
Intend to leave	36	59%
Undecided	34	56%

Factors Influencing the Decision to Remain in the Military. In 2004 and 2003, DACOWITS asked Servicemembers and their families to discuss the main factors that would influence their decision to stay in or leave the military. For those Servicemembers and family members who either intended to stay themselves or who were encouraging their significant other to stay, Table 3 highlights the results from groups held in 2004. The table displays those factors—in rank order of frequency—that were most influential in their decision.

Table 3: Factors Influencing the Decision to Remain in the Military

Theme	Number and percent of groups in which theme emerged (n =63)	
Enjoyment of the military job	57	90%
Benefits and compensation	49	78%
Career opportunities	35	56%
Job stability and security	28	44%
Patriotism and pride in service	27	43%
Family-related reasons	23	37%
Time invested	11	17%

Each theme is discussed below, along with a brief comparison of results collected for that theme in 2003. Some of the 2004 themes shown in the table above were worded slightly differently than in 2003. In such cases, clarification is provided in the overall discussion of results for each theme.

1. Enjoyment of the military job

Cited in 90% of the focus groups in 2004, job satisfaction was the primary factor influencing Service members' decisions to remain in the military. Job characteristics mentioned most often as influencing plans to stay included the opportunity to travel, military camaraderie, and the challenging nature of duties and assignments. In almost all focus groups, there were participants who explained that they simply enjoyed their military jobs. As one senior male officer exclaimed,

"It would take me 10 hours to tell you all the reasons why I like the Air Force. They'll have to kick me out!"

Other focus group participants were more specific in identifying the gratifying aspects of their military jobs:

"The responsibility is key for me." – Female Senior Officer, USAF

"I like moving around all over the U.S. and overseas." – Male Senior Enlisted, USN

Job satisfaction was also a prominent theme in 2003 focus groups, although not to the same extent as 2004. In 2003, the theme of "job characteristics" (which included the opportunity to travel, challenging assignments and others) was recorded in one third (33%) of focus groups. Additionally, the intangible elements of "love for the job", which is part of the theme of job satisfaction in 2004, was cited by participants in one-fourth of groups in 2003.

2. Benefits and compensation

In 2004, military benefits and compensation emerged as an important reason to stay among those intending to do so. Specifically, retirement benefits were cited in about two-fifths (41%) of groups, as were education benefits (38%). Basic pay was cited in about one-third (30%) as a reason to stay in the military. Healthcare benefits were also identified, albeit less frequently (16%). Many participants felt that the quality of benefits in the military was superior to that which could be obtained in the civilian sector.

"The best reasons to stay are the medical and retirement benefits."
– Senior male enlisted, USAF

In 2003, "benefits" was the number one theme cited as a reason to stay, recorded in about two-thirds of DACOWITS focus groups. Participants in 2003 cited retirement pay, health care, commissaries and exchanges and others as influencing their decisions. Similar to 2004, basic pay was cited by participants in about one-third of groups in 2003 as a reason to stay.

3. Career Opportunities

Within more than half of 2004 focus groups (56%), career progression and advancement was identified as an influential factor among those with an intention to stay. Focus group members reported taking advantage of the training and educational opportunities afforded them, and indicated a desire to remain in the military to continue utilizing these. Many focus groups

members also discussed the unique nature of these career development opportunities, acknowledging they would not be available in the civilian world. One senior enlisted female explained:

“I’ve had a tremendous amount of opportunities that I wouldn’t have had outside the Air Force - it’s been great for me.” – Senior enlisted female, USAF

Similar to the 2004 results, the theme of “career development opportunities” was recorded in about half of focus groups in 2003 as a reason to stay.

4. Job stability and security

The theme of job security and financial stability was recorded in slightly more than two-fifths (44%) of the focus groups in 2004. Focus group participants observed that the civilian job market was unstable and that they were ensuring their financial security by staying in the military. As one junior enlisted male in the Marine Corps put it:

“ [The] job market in the civilian [sector] is not too good. [There’s] no problem with military.”—
Junior enlisted male, USMC

The theme of job security emerged with similar frequency in 2003, recorded in approximately half of focus groups. Like 2004, job security directly followed career opportunities in the rank of order of themes recorded in 2003.

5. Patriotism and pride in service

Focus group members in 2004 also reported that their plans to stay in the military were based, to some extent, on the patriotism and pride they feel in serving their country (43%). One female warrant officer in the Marine Corps identified this influence clearly:

“I love what I do and I feel like I support the fight.”—Female warrant officer, USMC

Many family members agreed that their Soldier spouses were motivated by patriotism:

“My husband doesn’t stay in for the money; he’s patriotic. That’s part of the reason he went in [the military] to begin with.” – Spouse, USAR move to reserve.

In 2003, the intangible factor of “pride in service” was recorded in about one-fourth of groups as a factor influencing the decision to remain in the military.

6. Family-related reasons

Participants in more than one-third of the focus groups in 2004 (37%) reported their intention to stay was influenced by family-related reasons, such as finding and maintaining spouse employment and continuing a family tradition of participating in the military.

In 2003, the element of tradition was captured in the intangible theme of “military culture/lifestyle”, recorded in about one-fifth of groups held in 2003.

7. Time invested

Less frequently mentioned than other factors, time invested in the military (i.e., being close to retirement) was identified in 17% of focus groups as influencing the decision to stay. Some participants felt that they had reached the metaphorical “point-of-no-return” in their career and that they should complete their service. With her spouse five years away from retirement, one Air Force family member reported:

“It would seem almost foolish to get out now.” –Family member, USAF

Participants in 2003 focus groups also cited “time invested” as a reason they were choosing to remain in the military. This theme was recorded in about one-fourth of focus groups in 2003.

Factors Influencing the Decision to Leave the Military. Most focus groups in 2004 also contained Service members who expressed an intention to leave the military, or, in the case of family groups, spouses who hoped their significant other would not remain in the armed forces. Table 4 displays those factors that were most frequently recorded across groups as influential in the intention to leave. It is important to note that, while each factor is discussed separately, many of these factors are interrelated (e.g., workload vs. family-related reasons).

Table 4: Factors Influencing the Decision to Leave the Military

Theme	Number and percent of groups in which theme emerged (n =41)	
Conflict between work and family	29	71%
Change in personal goals	28	68%
Workload and schedule	21	51%
Benefits and compensation	12	29%
Job satisfaction	9	22%
Leadership or unit climate issues	9	22%
Incompatibility with the military	9	22%

Each theme is discussed below and contrasted with results obtained in 2003 DACOWITS focus groups.

1. Conflict between work and family

This theme, which also includes conflict between work and personal goals/relationships expressed by single Service members, was recorded within more than two-thirds of focus groups (71%) It was common among those with an intention to leave to express that their military obligations impinged upon their ability to form and maintain relationships with persons outside of the military, and/or that the military’s policy toward work and family balance was too inflexible. For example, when one senior female officer in the Air Force was asked why she was leaving, she expressed her frustration:

“I can't have a child and be working the way we do – rotating in 3 months at a time, 3 or so times a year.”—Female senior officer, USAF

Other focus group members explained that they intended to leave the Service because of spousal pressure or because of their spouse's job or career needs.

The major theme cited within 2003 focus groups as a reason to leave was the same as in 2004: Conflict between military duties and participants' family and personal life. This theme was recorded within approximately half of focus groups in 2003 (compared with more than two-thirds of groups in 2004.) This difference in frequency may simply reflect differences in the characteristics of selected participants and/or installations visited in 2004. Alternatively, it may be indicative of an increasing and cumulative burden being experienced by families and Service members involved in ongoing deployments.

2. Change in personal goals

Distinct from the theme of work-family conflict, this theme, recorded in two-thirds (68%) of groups, reflects the views of participants who were leaving in order to pursue personal or professional goals they believed could not be accomplished in the military.

Now, I want to stay home with [my] children. I already have more than 20 years [in the military]."
—Female senior officer- USN

Some participants articulated a desire to either try a new career path or revisit a former one, as illustrated by the following quotes:

"[I] would like to go into the entertainment field. [I'm] a musician - classically trained,"
— Junior enlisted male, USMC

"[I'm] anxious to get out and do something different."
— Senior enlisted female, USAF

In 2003, most of these issues were captured within the theme of "career options in the civilian sector", recorded in slightly less than half of focus groups during that year.

3. Workload and schedules

Slightly more than one-half (51%) of Servicemember focus groups mentioned workload and schedules as a factor influencing the retention decision. Specifically, about three-tenths (32%) of Servicemember focus groups indicated that the high frequency of unpredictable deployments contributed to the decision to leave the military. One junior enlisted Airman explained:

"I've been deployed 3 times, and this is my first assignment. I'm already burned out!"
—Junior enlisted female, USAF

In 2003, similar comments were recorded within the broader theme of "job characteristics and career issues". This theme encompassed such concerns as travel and relocation demands, as well as dissatisfaction with specialization (considered separately for 2004). In 2003, job characteristics and career issues" was recorded within slightly less than half of focus groups.

Participants also mentioned both the high PERSTEMPO and OPTEMPO as factors impacting their decision to leave the military. Commenting on why her Soldier spouse is leaving, one family member revealed that her Soldier spouse:

“does not enjoy the Coast Guard as much as before [due to] longer hours. [He is] currently frustrated with his job, and the job is a ‘brain drain.’ He feels the qualified ones are leaving.”
—Coast Guard family member

4. Benefits and compensation

Participants in about one-third (29%) of focus groups pinpointed benefits and compensation as a reason for leaving the military. Individual participants identifying this theme felt that they would be better compensated in the civilian sector.

“Why do I want to do this, when I can work 8 hours/day and make more money on the outside?”
- Senior enlisted female, USAF

In 2003, comments similar to those expressed in the quote above were captured within the theme of “career opportunities in the civilian sector”, recorded in roughly one-third of groups in 2003.

5. Job satisfaction

While some Service members identified job satisfaction as a reason to stay in the military, this theme also emerged as influence to leave within one fifth (22%) of groups in 2004. Among the job-related elements that tended to lead to dissatisfaction included a perception of limited upward mobility, and unrewarding duties and assignments.

In 2003, these comments were captured within the broader theme of “job characteristics and career issues,” recorded in about half of the focus groups that year.

6. Leadership or unit climate issues

Leadership or unit climate issues were recorded in about one-fifth (22%) of focus groups in 2004. Aspects of this overall theme that were expressed by individual participants included the belief that professional achievements were not recognized, that their subordinates did not respect them, or that women are not treated with the same respect as men within certain career fields. For example, a junior enlisted female Servicemember reported that although she loves the Air Force:

“It's like the good-old-boy system. ‘You're female. You're fragile. You can't do that.’ ”
— Junior enlisted female, USAF

In 2003 comments related to the role of leadership and unit climate as a reason to leave were recorded in less than one fifth of focus groups.

1. Incompatibility with the military

About one-fourth (22%) of groups contained individuals who expressed a general failure to adapt to the military culture or lifestyle. These participants reported feeling alienated by hierarchy, regulations and policies, lack of personal freedom, or the overall pace of military life.

Incompatibility with “military culture and lifestyle” was recorded as a reason to leave in 15% of focus groups in 2003.

Factors Influencing Undecided Participants. Not all focus groups contained undecided personnel or family members. Among those groups that did contain undecided participants, and who elaborated on the factors that would affect their retention decision in the future, the themes shown in Table 5 below emerged most frequently in 2004:

Table 5: Factors influencing the military career decisions of “undecided” participants

Theme	Number and percent of groups in which theme emerged (n=35)	
Job opportunities	20	57%
Work/family balance	14	40%
Leadership and other unit climate factors	10	29%
Workload and schedule	9	26%
Compatibility of military with personal goals	8	23%
Benefits and compensation	7	20%

1. Job Opportunities

Participants in more than one-half (57%) of groups with undecided Service members identified job opportunities as a theme impacting their retention decision. Many undecided participants reported that the availability of advancement opportunities, including promotions, would greatly influence their decision. Some felt their capabilities exceeded their opportunities:

“I feel like I have a lot more potential than I have the opportunity to do.”
– Junior female officer, USAF

Undecided participants also identified duties and assignments as a factor that would influence their retention decision. Individual participants reported that they were currently dissatisfied with their duties and assignments and wanted to change career fields. Some mentioned that they would stay in the military if they received a new position.

“I will stay in the military if I can change career fields.” – Junior enlisted female, USAF

In 2003, these issues were captured within the themes of “career advancement,” recorded as an influence on undecided participants in 30% of groups, and “job characteristics,” recorded within 44% of groups.

2. Work/Family Balance

Participants in two-fifths (40%) of 2004 focus groups containing undecided personnel reported that work/family balance issues would impact their decision.

“If I didn't have any children I might stay. I really don't have time to be actively involved in things.” – Senior enlisted female, USCG

In 2003 groups that contained undecided participants, issues related to the balance of military obligations with family and personal life were recorded in about half of groups. This was the number one theme among undecided participants in 2003.

3. Leadership and other unit climate factors

Undecided participants in about one-third (29%) of focus groups in 2004 reported that leadership and other unit climate factors would impact their decision. Specific aspects that were stressed included differential treatment and lack of recognition and respect. One junior enlisted female explained that she felt undecided because of:

“the changes in the [Coast Guard] in general. The overall command climate; there's nothing but hypocrisy.”— Junior enlisted female, USCG

In 2003, leadership and unit climate were not emphasized within groups containing undecided personnel.

4. Workload and schedules

Undecided participants in slightly more than one-fourth (26%) of groups in 2004 reported that workload and schedules contribute to the retention decision. Explaining why she felt undecided about staying or leaving the military, one senior enlisted female stated:

“It's OPTEMPO for me. The Air Force is trying to do too much with too few people.”
—Senior enlisted female, USAF

In 2003, these comments were captured under the broader theme of “job characteristics,” recorded in about half of focus groups containing undecided participants.

5. Compatibility of the Military with Personal Goals

This theme emerged in one-fourth (23%) of focus groups containing vocal undecided personnel. For example, several groups contained at least one person who felt undecided about staying or leaving the military because they desired a career change, but that such a change depended on the job market. Others felt undecided because they wanted to pursue higher education outside of the military:

“If civilian market gets better I may get out.” – Junior enlisted male, USMC

“I was activated and want to finish my degree.” – Junior enlisted female, USAFR

In 2003, the desire to “pursue other opportunities” was recorded as an influence on undecided participants within about one-tenth of groups, and the theme of the “external job market” was raised in 7% of groups.

6. Benefits and Compensation

In one-fifth (20%) of groups with undecided personnel, the theme of benefits and compensation was raised as a retention influence. Individual participants focused on the limitations of key aspects of benefits and compensation: retirement, basic pay, and health care coverage:

“I think the benefits are something that a lot of people look at before they decide to leave [the military]. With 3 kids and ear infections, colds, the flu, and ER visits, even if you get an 80K job, your insurance only covers 80% of that - 20% is a lot of money.”

– Officer family member, USAF

In 2003, the issue of benefits and compensation was not recorded as a major theme for undecided personnel, except as these issues related to the job market conditions documented in the previous theme.

Reservists’ Career Intentions. The following section focus exclusively on the retention factors cited in focus groups held with Guard and Reserve members in 2004. Table 6 highlights those factors, in rank order of frequency, that were cited as most influential by Reservists who had decided to stay.

Table 6: Factors Influencing the Decision to Stay in the Military Among Reserve Groups*

Theme	Number and percent of groups in which theme emerged (n=12)	
Enjoyment of military job	12	100%
Benefits and compensation	8	58%
Patriotism/Pride in the military	6	50%
Job stability and security	1	9%

Overall, Reservists’ reasons for staying in the military were consistent with the influences recorded overall in 2004. Enjoyment of the job, benefits and compensation, and career opportunities were three major reasons to stay across groups from both the Reserve and the active component communities.

There were slight differences, however. For example, the theme of job stability and security was recorded in smaller percentage of Reserve groups (9%) than was true for all groups combined (44%); understandable since the military is not the primary occupation of most Reservists. Also, unlike for active component groups, the theme of “time invested” was not recorded in Reserve groups as a major influence to stay. Though patriotism/pride in service was articulated as a reason to stay by both active and Reserve component participants, this theme was recorded in a larger percentage of Reserve component groups (64%) than for all groups combined (43%).

“If I didn't love what I did and didn't think I made a difference, I wouldn't be here. I love who I work with. This is a family.” – Senior enlisted female, USAR

Table 7 displays those factors, in rank order of frequency, that were cited as most influential by Reservists who had decided to leave the military.

Table 7: Factors Influencing the Decision to Leave the Military Among Reserve Groups

Theme	Number and percent of groups in which theme emerged (n=5)	
Conflict between work and family	3	60%
Close to retirement	1	20%
PCS/Relocation/Instability	1	20%
Workload and schedule	1	20%
Changing military status from Reserve to Active Component	1	20%

Table 7 shows that, as was true for the all focus groups combined, conflict between military duties and family obligations was the primary theme (60%) recorded among Reservists with intentions to leave. The following comment by a female junior officer in the Army Reserve is an example:

“After 9/11, I was ready to be activated, but now that I'm having my first child, I don't know how it's going to work out. I think the first thing that will have to go is my participation in the Reserves. Now that activations are like 2-years long, I'm worried.”
 – Female junior officer, USAR

Proximity to retirement, the instability of relocation, workload and schedule issues and a change in military status from Reserve to Active Component were each mentioned in one Reserve group as a factor influencing the decision to leave.

Table 8 below displays the main factors that will influence the decision of undecided Reservists who participated in DACOWITS focus groups in 2004. With minor exceptions, these factors track with those recorded for undecided participants overall.

Table 8: Factors Influencing the Military Career Decisions of “Undecided” Participants in Reserve Groups

Theme	Number and percent of groups in which theme emerged (n=5)	
Work/Family balance	4	80%
Job opportunities	3	60%
Workload and schedule	2	40%
Leadership and other unit climate factors	2	40%
Change in personal goals	2	40%

Factors influencing the retention perceptions of family members. An axiom among those concerned with military quality of life issues is that “the military recruits Service members, but it retains families”. Table 9 below displays the major retention influences articulated by family members who believed their Service member spouses intended to stay in the military.

Table 9: Factors Influencing the Decision to Stay for Family Member Groups

Theme	Number and percent of groups in which theme emerged (n=12)	
	Number	Percent
Enjoyment of military job	12	100%
Benefits and compensation	7	58%
Patriotism/Pride in Service	6	50%
Job stability and security	5	42%

As Table 9 indicates, a similar set of dominant themes emerged within family member groups as in focus groups overall. Each family member group contained at least one participant who expressed that their Service member spouse would remain in the military because they enjoyed their job:

“[My husband] loves the Marines and wants to do 30 years.” – Family member, USMC

Benefits, compensation and job stability were also considered important to family members who believed their spouses would chose to stay in the military. One spouse summarized several of the major reasons to stay in a single comment:

“We consider ourselves very new to the military. [My husband’s] job is exciting. The benefits are good. Retirement is good, and there’s advancement and other possibilities.”
– Family member, USCG

As was true for the focus groups overall, family members recognized that their Service member spouses remained in the military in part due to the pride they feel in serving:

“[My husband’s] goal is to stay in the Marine Corps until he’s 26. He’s wanted to be a Marine since he was 8 years old.” – Family member, USMC

Table 10 below displays the major retention influences articulated by family members who believed their Service member spouses intended to leave in the military. The top three themes recorded within family member groups—workload and schedule, family related issues, and a shift in personal goals— were the same as those recorded in DACOWITS focus groups overall in 2004, through the order of the three issues is slightly different.

Table 10: Factors Influencing the Decision to Leave for Family Member Groups

Theme	Number and percent of groups in which theme emerged (n=12)	
	Number	Percent
Family-related issues	4	33%
Workload and schedule	4	33%
Change in personal goals	3	25%
Relocation/Instability	2	17%

As with focus groups overall, the conflict between work and family, raised in one-third (33%) of the family groups, was the principal influence to leave raised by family members. Workload and schedule was also raised in a third of family member groups, and changes in personal goals in one-fourth of groups. For some family member participants, these concerns were inter-related:

“[My husband] just decided to get out. He's been in the Air Force for 21 years. He's a Squad Commander and his hours are really intense. We started our family late and have 2 little ones at home. We've shifted our priorities and are ready to start on the next phase [of our life].”

– Family member, USAF

The theme of instability caused by multiple relocations was raised in about one-fifth (17%) of family member groups:

“For senior officers, the rapid PCS moves are very hard on kids.”

–Family member, USA

The themes of workload and schedule and deployment/mobilization were recorded most frequently among family members whose Service member spouses were undecided. Workload and schedule was raised in 3 of these family member groups (one-fourth of the total number of family member groups held):

“[My husband] loves his job, but there is too much other stuff that comes up which keeps him from doing his job [such as] health issues with our child.”

– Family member, USMC

Concern about deployment was voiced by family members of undecided personnel in 2 groups:

“We've been married for 3 years, and we've only probably been together for 6 months of that. If I had my way, he'd go back to the dental field or to a career field where he doesn't have to be deployed as much.” – Family member, USAF

Retention Influences for Female Junior Officers. Table 11 below highlights the themes stressed by junior female officers as their main influences to remain in the military.

Table 11: Factors Influencing Female Junior Officers' Decision to Stay

Theme	Number and percent of groups in which theme emerged (n=6)	
Enjoyment of the military job	6	100%
Benefits and compensation	4	67%
Job stability and security	3	50%
Camaraderie	3	50%
Career advancement opportunities	2	33%

Table 11 shows that, similar to other groups discussed, participants in female junior officer groups stressed job satisfaction, benefits and compensation, job security and camaraderie in their decision to stay. Reflecting on the enjoyment of her military experience, one female junior officer explained:

“I am not done with my adventure.” –Junior officer female, USMC

Another stressed both job satisfaction and camaraderie in her response:

“The main thing was my job. I like what I do. I like my colleagues. Sometimes the patients aren't so great. They can be a challenge, but my colleagues are the driving force. They can be very professional. It's great to work with people that you know how to motivate and who also know how to motivate you.” – Junior officer female, USAF

The importance of stability is reflected in this comment from another junior officer female in the Air Force:

“Job stability. The chances of me being downsized - or that kind of thing - are slim to none. The engineers have an advantage; it doesn't matter what kind of aircraft system they're going to. They're always going to need us to maintain the building.”
– Junior officer female, USAF

Table 12 displays the major themes influencing the decision of junior female officers with an intention to leave the military.

Table 12: Factors Influencing the Decision to Female Junior Officers’ Decision to Leave

Theme	Number and percent of groups in which theme emerged (n=6)	
Conflict between work and family	5	83%
Change in personal goals	3	50%
Workload and schedule	1	17%
Deployment	1	17%

Consistent with other demographic and rank groups, female officers who were leaving stressed the inability to balance their military obligations with their family roles, or for single personnel, with their personal relationships:

“You pretty much have to find someone out of the military to have a relationship with.”
Junior female officer– USAF

Others were looking forward to a change of pace from their military job:

“I want to do something else. I don't want this to be the only thing I've done. I want some variety.” – Junior female officer, USCG

“My goal was to come into the military and serve 4 or 5 years. It wasn't my intention to stay in for 20. Everyone's having a good time on the pamphlet. I was just too stubborn to quit before now. I served my country, and now I am ready to move on.”
--Junior female officer, USCG

Table 13 shows the main factors that will influence the decision of undecided female junior officers.

Table 13: Factors influencing the military career decisions of undecided female junior officers

Theme	Number and percent of groups in which theme emerged (n=6)	
Job opportunities	2	33%
Career progression	2	33%
Work/family balance	2	33%

The table indicates that the factors influencing undecided junior officer females in 2004 DACOWITS focus groups are similar to issues stressed by undecided members throughout the force: job opportunities, work and family balance and career progression. For example, one female junior officer noted:

“I would stay if I got the job I wanted.” – Female junior officer, USA

Similarly:

“I might stay if I was awarded a company command.” –Female junior officer, USA

Another pointed out that family factors as well as career stagnation would influence her decision:

“I'm undecided pretty much because of family-related reasons, and teaching is in the back of my mind too. In the 3 years that I've been in the Air Force, I've worn 3 different badges. My career field keeps changing. I feel like I come in, work 12 hours, and nobody notices. Again, this could very much be specific to my career field. I want some more freedom. –
Junior officer female, USAF

II. FOCUS GROUPS RESULTS: WORKING IN ORIGINAL CAREER FIELD

Service member focus groups typically contained a mixture of individuals who reported that they currently worked in the job they were trained to do when they first entered the military, and others who reported that they no longer did so. About four-fifths (81%) of groups contained at least one participant who had remained in their original career field, and about two-thirds (64%) of groups contained one or more participants who had switched from their original field (Table 14).

Table 14: Are you currently working in the job you were trained to do when you entered the military?*

Response	Number and percent of groups in which response was recorded (n =42)	
Yes	34	81%
No	27	64%

* Percentages refer to groups, not to individuals, and for this reason do not sum to 100%.

Most Service members who reported they currently working in their original MOS did not offer explanation as to why they still do so. Within those sessions in which Service members elaborated on why they continued to work in the same field, those most common reasons were that:

- They were denied the opportunity to cross-train (recorded in 6 groups)

- Certain career fields provide limited lateral mobility (recorded in 6 groups).

For example, one junior enlisted male explained:

“I’m in the job I started out with. I tried to change many times: after 4 years in, after 8 years in, and after 11 years in, but wasn’t allowed. I was shot down from base level all the way to HQ, and it looks like I’m stuck here as a crew chief.” – Junior enlisted male

Among participants who reported working in a different career field and who elaborated on the reasons why, the most frequent themes were:

- They were rotated or reassigned to another job (recorded in 6 groups)
- They requested and received cross-training (recorded in 4 groups)
- They were forced to cross-train due to overstaffing in a particular career field (recorded in 4 groups).

III. FOCUS GROUP RESULTS: RETAINING THOSE WITH HIGH DEMAND MILITARY SKILLS

DACOWITS asked Service members in 2004 to identify one or two things the military should do differently to retain people with high demand skills and characteristics. Table 15 presents the major themes recorded in active component versus Reserve component Service member groups.

Table 15: Suggestions for retaining persons with high demand skills and characteristics

Theme	Number and percent of groups in which response was recorded	
Active component groups (n=38)		
Benefits and compensation	32	84%
Career advancement opportunities	12	32%
Job-related factors	10	26%
Reserve component groups (n=10)		
Benefits and compensation	4	40%
Deployment/unpredictability	3	30%
Career advancement opportunities	2	20%

1. Benefits and Compensation

The theme of benefits and compensation was mentioned in four-fifths (84%) of active duty Service member groups and in about one-third (32%) of Reserve groups. Most participants who identified the theme of benefits and compensation suggested that the military should increase bonuses and pay. For example, some junior enlisted females in the Air Force Reserve felt that when serving on active duty, the military should provide Reserve component members with both education and healthcare benefits comparable to those received by active component personnel. Similarly, a senior enlisted male from the active component commented:

“That’s easy. For us career types with twenty or more years, give us bonuses! They know they’ve got me. Why punish me for being in so long? For enlistees, after 20 years, bonuses are cut off.”—Senior enlisted male, USAF

Other Service members, both active and reserve, mentioned that the military should increase pay to match that of the civilian sector:

“Even with bonuses, [once] you get out into the civilian world, you get [paid] so much more. There are people making twice as much as you and doing the same work. Plus, they don’t have to put up with doing PT.” – Senior enlisted female, USA

2. Career Advancement Opportunities

Participants in approximately one-third (32%) of active duty Service member groups and one-fifth (20%) of Reserve groups mentioned the issue of career advancement opportunities as something the military could do differently to retain people with high demand skills. Specifically, participants in both active duty and reserve focus groups mentioned that the lack of both promotional opportunities and different tracks to allow for depth and breadth deter people with high demand skills from continuing on with their military career:

“I have to compete for promotion in my MOS, yet I am not even working in my MOS; so, I don’t even have promotional opportunities. No one has been promoted in the last 6 months.”
– Junior enlisted male, USAF

“Pilots get all the good deals in the Air Force. If you are not a pilot and in support services, the career fields are not open to you.”
—Female senior officer, USAF

3. Job-Related Factors

Though the theme of job-related factors was prominent within active duty Service member groups, it only surfaced in one-tenth (10%) of reserve Service member focus groups. Participants who mentioned this theme were concerned with the lack of travel opportunities, being stationed in undesirable locations, performing uninteresting duties and assignments, and not working in their MOS. For instance, when one senior enlisted female in the Marine Corps was asked what the military could do differently to retain people with high demand skills, she replied:

“[Allow them the] opportunity to work within the area they specialize. If you speak several languages, allow the person to work in that field.”
– Senior enlisted female, USMC

A senior enlisted female in the Coast Guard felt that job location affected the military’s ability to retain persons with valuable skill sets:

“I think in my field [the reason people leave] is job location. After 10 years, you have the option to homestead and after that things could be a lot easier.”—Senior enlisted female, USCG

4. Deployment/Unpredictability

These issues were raised in about one-third (33%) of Reserve groups, but only one-tenth (11%) of active duty groups. Participants who identified deployment and unpredictability as a factors detracting from the military’s ability to retain people with high-level skills suggested the military should limit the length of deployments and PCS moves. For example, a senior enlisted female in the Army Reserve stated:

“Deployment needs to be shorter term. If I wanted to be active duty, I would be active duty. I don’t want to go for 1 to 2 years.”—Senior enlisted female, USAR

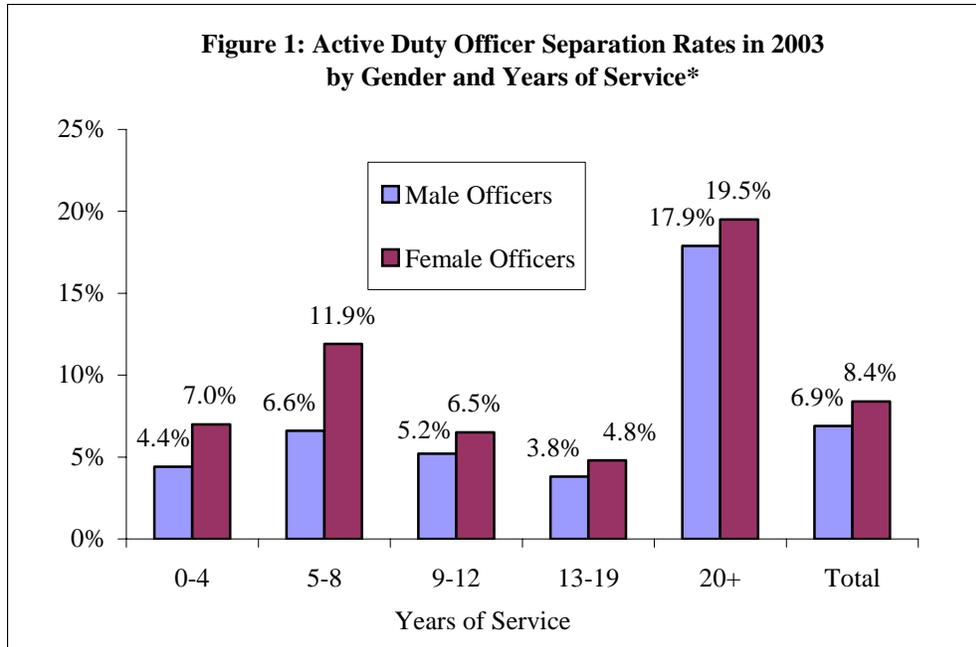
IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS: SEPARATION RATES, CAREER INTENTIONS AND FINDINGS FROM THE CIVILIAN LITERATURE

This section provides recent survey data and research literature focusing on women’s retention in both the military and the civilian workforce, and identifies emergent trends in these areas. The following topics are addressed.

- Comparison of rates of separation and career intentions of male and female active duty and Selected Reserve (SELRES) officers
- Factors that contribute to gender differences in retention
- Women’s civilian workforce participation and factors affecting their retention
- Additional findings from the literature.

Each is discussed below.

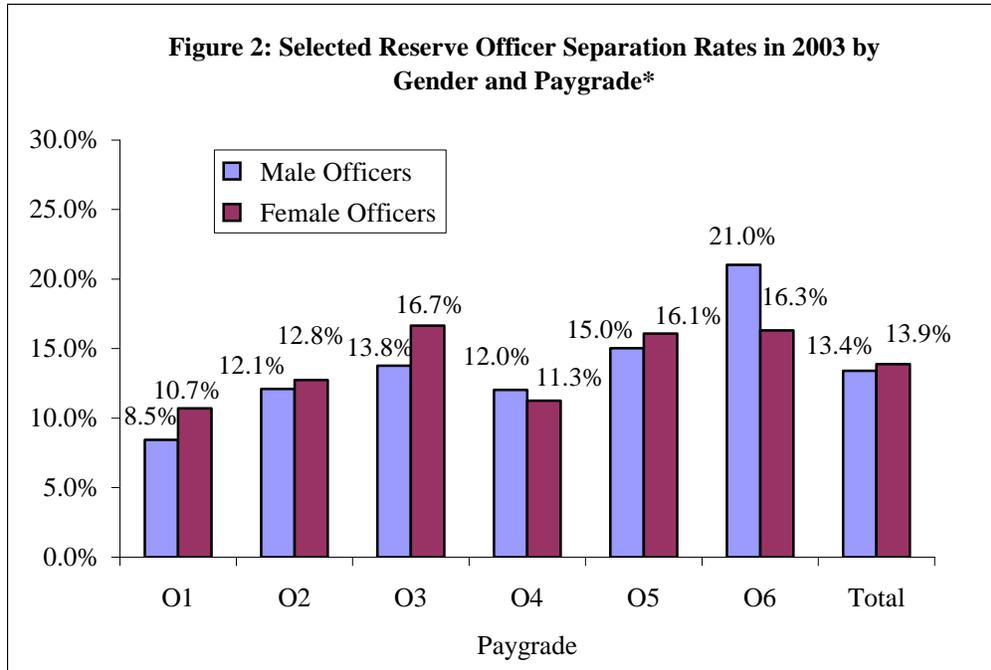
Rates of Separation. Data on 2003 officer separations compiled by the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) indicate that, on average, female active duty officers are more likely than active duty male officers to separate from service during the early stages of their careers. Figure 1 compares the DMDC officer separations data by gender and years of service. The data indicate that larger percentages of females than males separated from service at each of five distinct periods: 0-4, 5-8, 9-12, 13-19 and 20 or more years of service.



* Source: Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC), *Fiscal Year 2003 Commissioned Officer Separation Rates for Active Duty and SELRES* (February, 2004).

The researchers note that female officer separation rates are markedly higher than those of males at 8 years of service and below, and that the gap is most pronounced at 5-8 years of service (11.9% vs. 6.6%, respectively).¹ Because the majority of officers are in their early twenties when they receive their commission, most will be in their late twenties or early thirties when they have accrued 5-8 years of military service. This is also the age window in which most women with a college education have their first child.²

There are also gender differences in rates of separation among officers in the Selected Reserve, though overall, the differences are less pronounced than for active duty officers. In 2003, female Selected Reserve officers separated at a rate of 13.9%, and males at 13.4% (Figure 2). The most pronounced differences in separation rates occur in grades O1 (males 8.5% vs. females 10.7%), O3 (males 13.8% vs. females 16.7%), and O6, where the separation rate is higher for male officers than for females (21% and 16.3%, respectively).

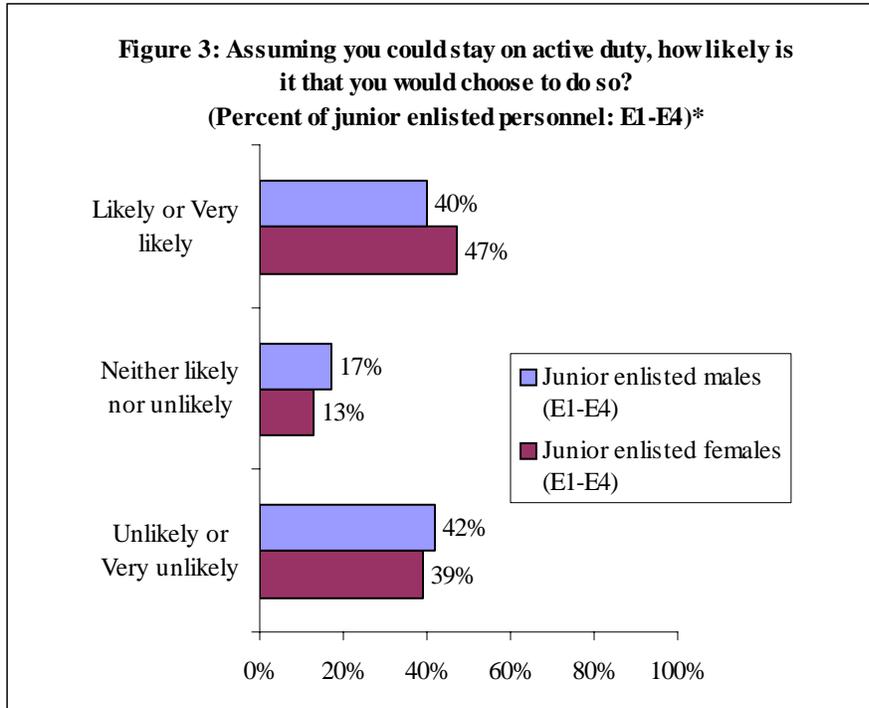


* Source: Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC), *Fiscal Year 2003 Commissioned Officer Separation Rates for Active Duty and SELRES* (February, 2004).

Career Intentions. DoD and the military Services regularly survey the career intentions of military personnel in order to gauge future retention trends, and to gain insight into the factors that Service members consider most influential in their career decisions. On the April 2004 Status of Forces Survey of Active-Duty Members (SOFA) for example, Servicemembers were asked to respond to the following question:

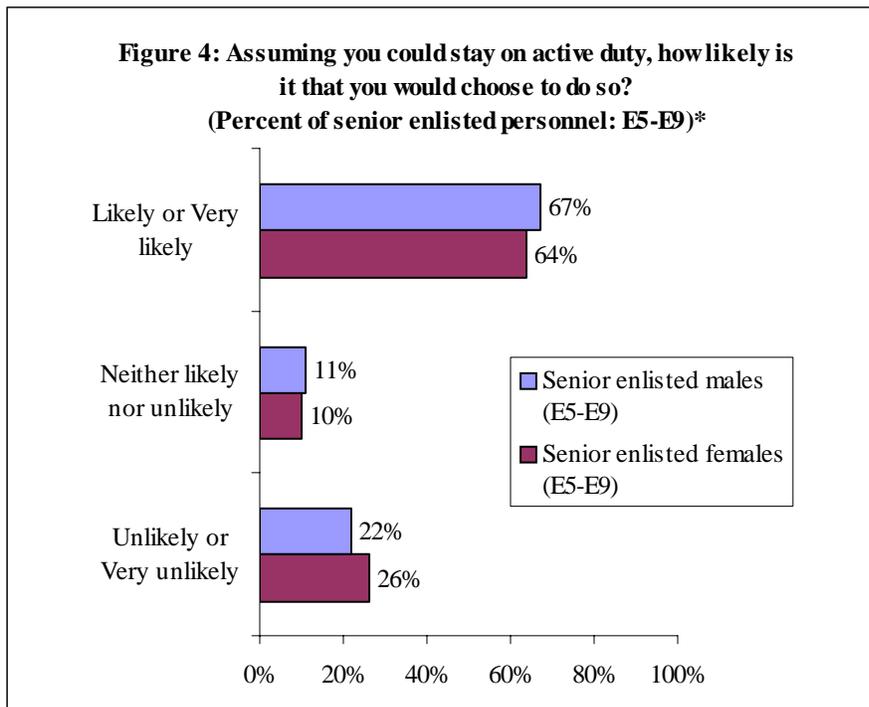
“Suppose that you have to decide whether to stay on active duty. Assuming you could stay, how likely is it that you would choose to do so?”

Figures 3 through 6 compare, respectively, gender-specific career intentions among junior enlisted personnel (E1-E4), senior enlisted personnel (E5-E9), junior officers (O1-O3) and senior officers (O4 and up).³ As shown in Figure 3, junior enlisted personnel (E1-E4) have relatively low reported intentions to stay in the military (47% among males and 40% among females). Because the estimated margin of error reported for the estimates above is +/- 3% for males and +/- 5% for females, the apparent gender differences in Figure 3 should not be considered statistically significant.



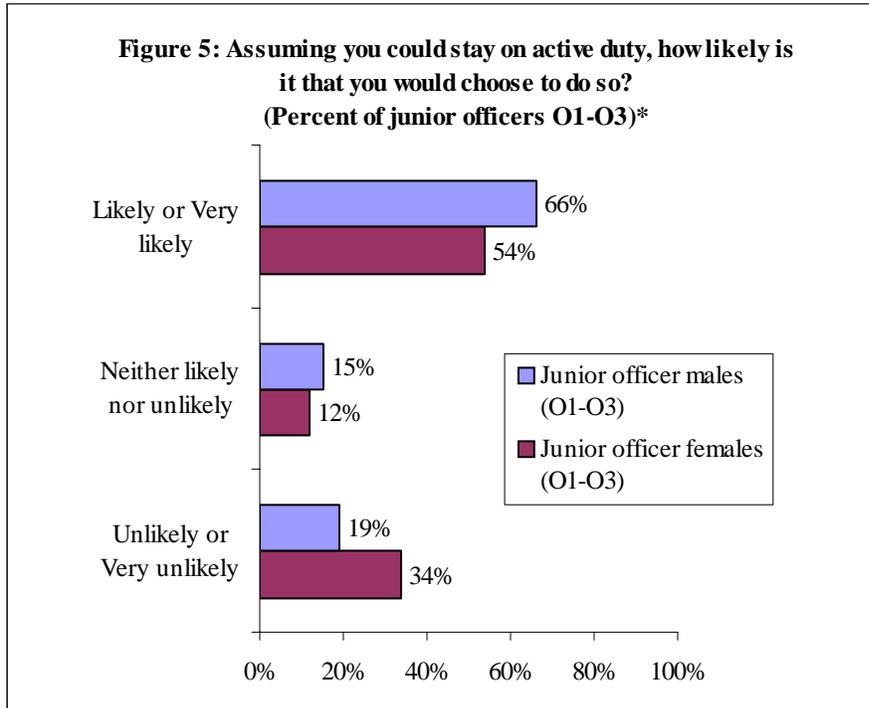
* Source: April 2004 Status of Forces Survey of Active Duty Members. DMDC.

Figure 4 illustrates that, within the senior enlisted ranks, there are minimal gender differences in current career intentions. The reported margin of error for these estimates is the same as in Figure 3.



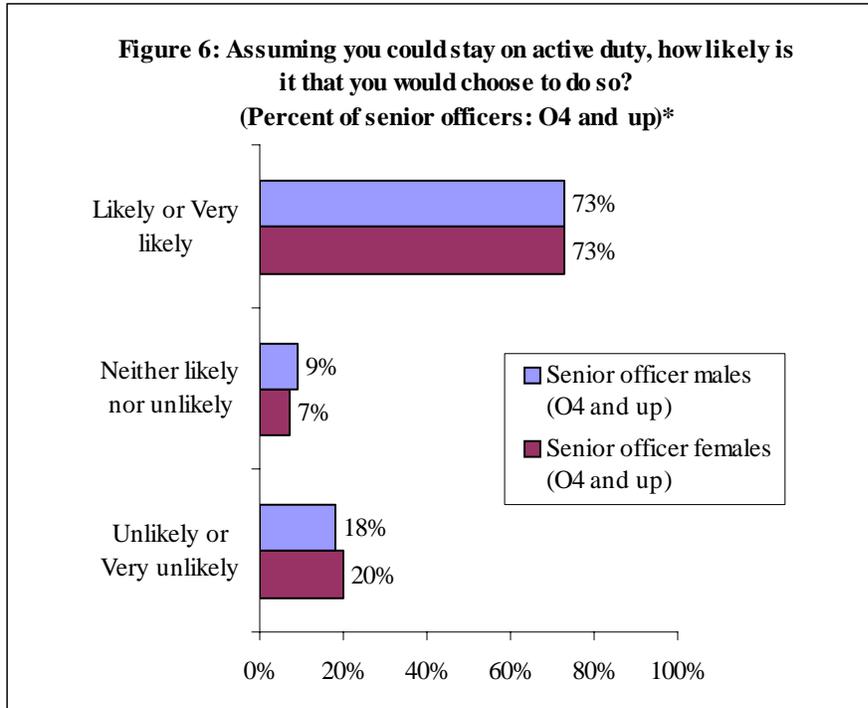
* Source: April 2004 Status of Forces Survey of Active Duty Members. DMDC.

Figure 5 shows gender-specific career intentions among junior officers, who are somewhat less likely than senior officers to report the intention to remain in the military. Unlike the previous figures, the gender difference in intentions to stay among junior officers (12 percentage points) is statistically significant (margin of error +/- 3% for men and +/-5 % for women). That is, female junior officers are significantly less likely to report the intention to stay than their male counterparts.



* Source: April 2004 Status of Forces Survey of Active Duty Members. DMDC.

Figure 6 illustrates that, among males and females who have achieved more senior officer ranks (O4 and up), there is little to no gender difference in reported career intentions.



There are several additional factors other than gender that play a role in officer separations and career intentions and that must be carefully considered. Some of these additional factors—such as commissioning source, education, family status, and perceptions of advancement—are not equally distributed by gender. These factors are discussed in the following section.

Factors that contribute to gender differences in retention. This section briefly describes the relationship of the following factors that may contribute to, or otherwise affect, reported gender differences in officer retention:

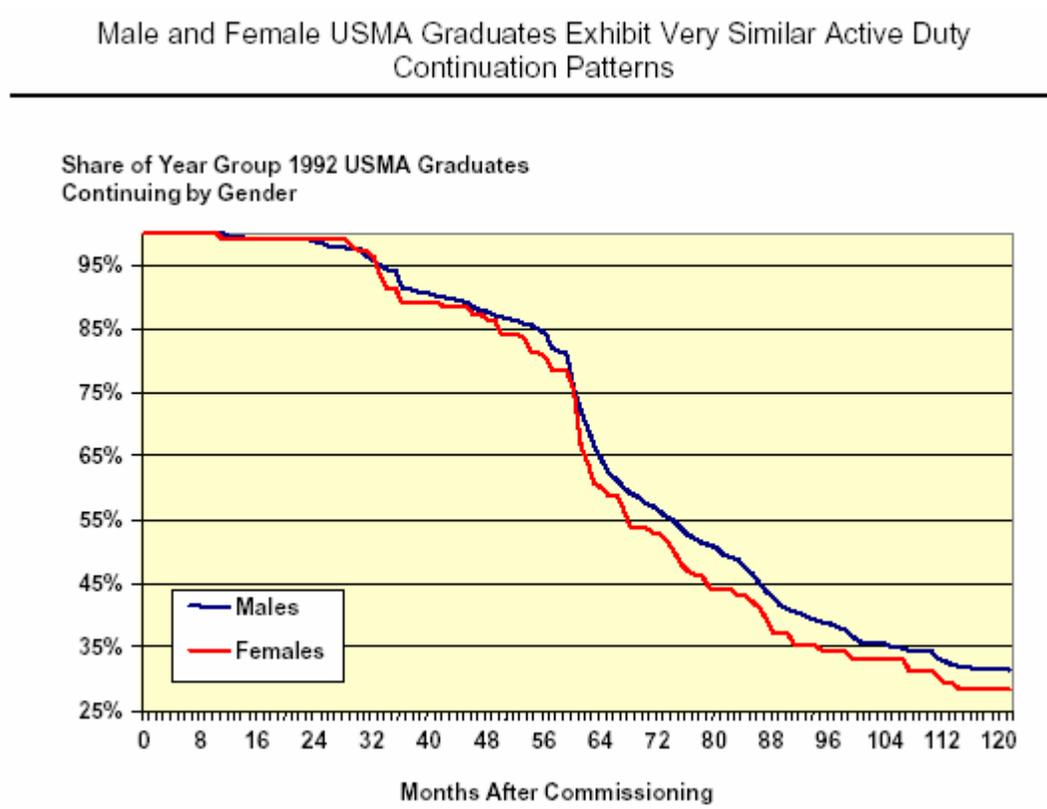
- Commissioning source
- Education
- Family status
- Perceptions of advancement opportunity.

The end of the section provides, by gender, results from the most recent DMDC Exit Survey on reasons officers reported they were leaving the military.

Commissioning Source. Research conducted by the Office of Economic and Manpower Analysis (OEMA) at the U.S. Military Academy finds that commissioning source is related to retention patterns among both male and female Army officers.⁴ OEMA found that, among 1992 graduates from the U.S. Military Academy, there were essentially no gender differences in

continuation patterns after commissioning (Figure 7). Similarity in continuation rates by gender among USMA graduates is consistent across year groups (e.g., the 1992 cohort).

Figure 7: Army Officer Continuation Pattern by Gender: USMA Graduates*

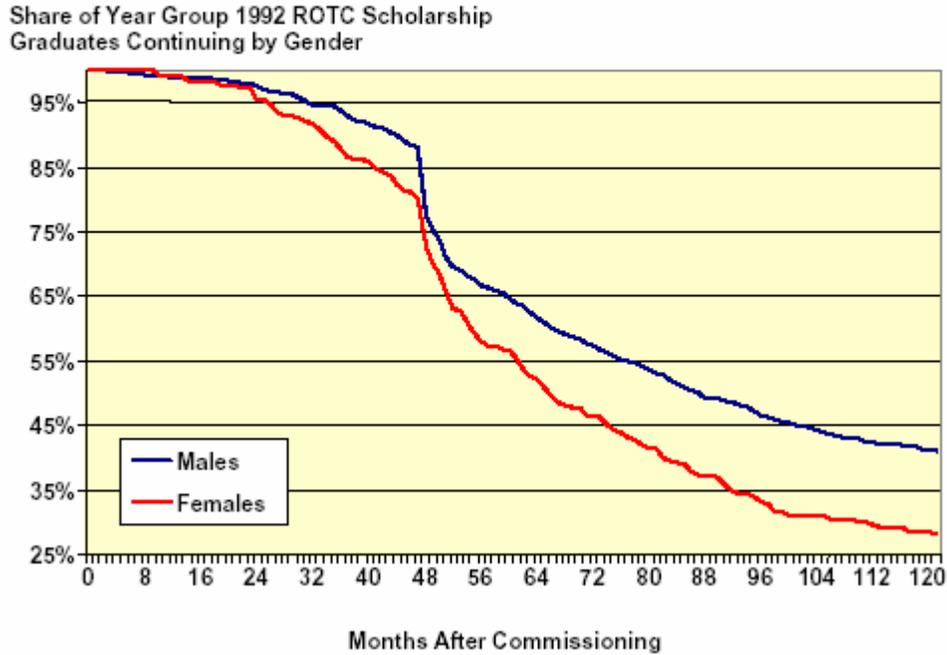


* Source: E.C. Wardynski, and L.B. Gallagher, *Competitive Category Officer Continuations: A look at female Army officer retention* (OEMA, Department of Social Sciences, United States Military Academy, 2003).

Continuation rates of Army officers commissioned through ROTC scholarship and non-scholarship programs exhibit greater divergence by gender, with female officers continuing at lower rates (Figure 8).

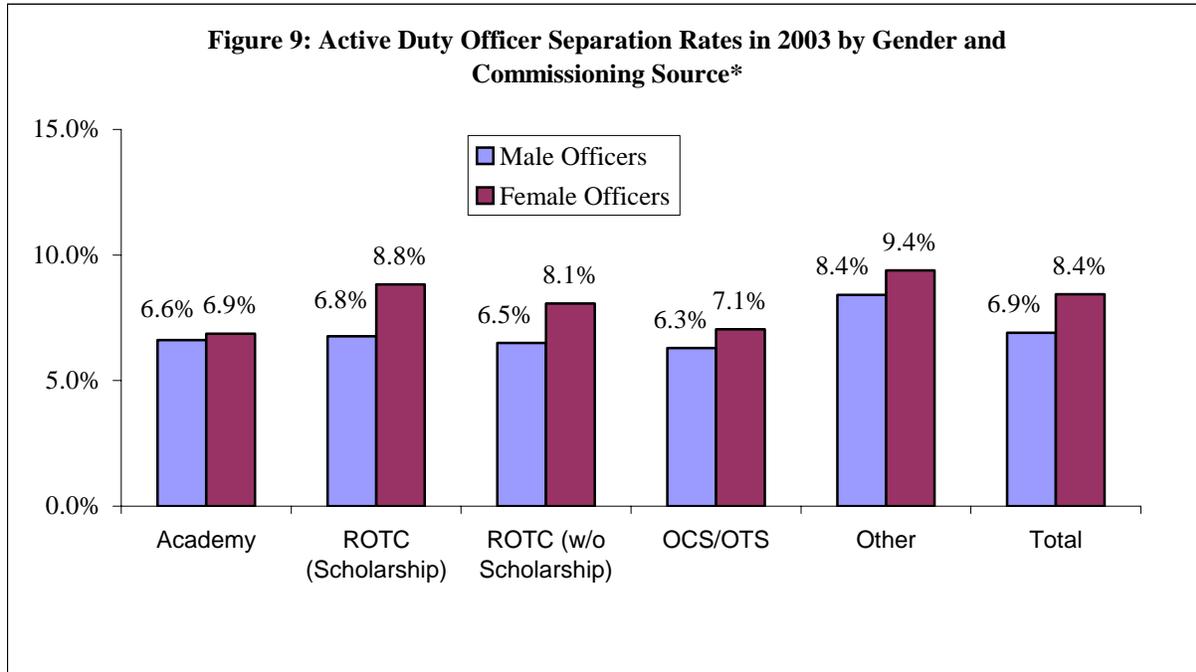
Figure 8: Army Officer Continuation Pattern by Gender: ROTC Scholarship Programs*

Graduates of ROTC Scholarship Programs Exhibit a Relatively High Divergence in Continuations by Gender with Females Continuing at Lower Rates



* Source: E.C. Wardynski, and L.B. Gallagher, *Competitive Category Officer Continuations: A look at female Army officer retention* (OEMA, Department of Social Sciences, United States Military Academy, 2003).

In Figure 9, DMDC reports similar patterns across the DoD as a whole. For all Academy graduates, 2003 officer separation rates for females and males differed very little (6.9% vs. 6.6%, respectively), while female officers commissioned through ROTC programs and other sources tended to separate at higher rates than their male counterparts.



Source: Fiscal Year 2003 Commissioned Officer Separation Rates for Active Duty and SELRES. DMDC.

Because female officers commissioned through the Service academies have lower rates of separation, gender differences in commissioning source should be considered. Table 16 indicates that, among officers commissioned in 1997,⁵ a smaller proportion of women (10.9%) than men (18.7%) were commissioned through the academies. The relatively smaller proportion of female officers commissioned through the Academies may contribute to the overall gender differences seen in officer retention rates.

Table 16: Source of Commission by Gender: 1997 Officer Accessions

Source	Male	Female
Academy	18.7	10.9
ROTC (scholarship)	27.1	31.2
ROTC (non-scholarship)	12.1	10.2
OCS/OTS	19.1	9.5
Direct Appointment	17.1	35.7
Other	5.4	2.0
Unknown	0.6	0.3
All Sources	100.0	100.0

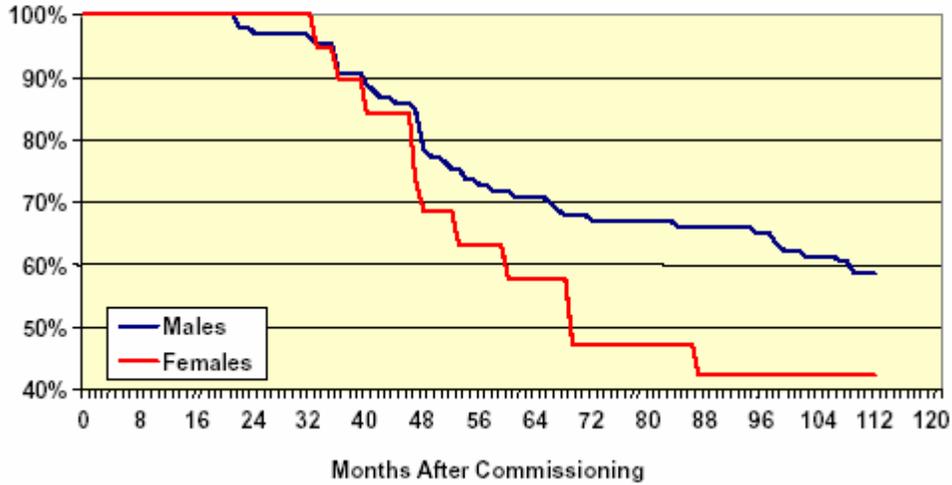
* Source: Career Progression of Minority and Women Officers. 1999: OUSD-P&R

Education. OMEA’s analysis also finds that the most pronounced gender differences in the continuation patterns of males and females occur among officers who graduate from general academic colleges that do not require significantly high entry examination scores or significantly high High School grades to apply for the undergraduate programs (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Gender-Specific Continuation Patterns Among Army Officers Graduating From General Academic Undergraduate Programs

Male and Female Army Officers Who Graduated from Noncompetitive Undergraduate Institutions Exhibited the Greatest Divergence in Continuations

Share of Year Group 1994 Graduates From Noncompetitive Undergraduate Institutions Remaining by Sex



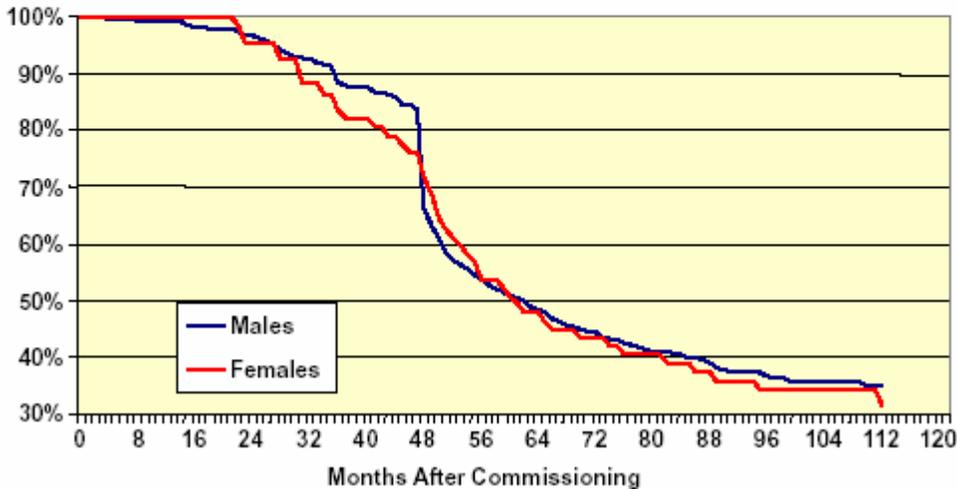
* Source: E.C. Wardynski, and L.B. Gallagher, *Competitive Category Officer Continuations: A look at female Army officer retention* (OEMA, Department of Social Sciences, United States Military Academy, 2003).

In contrast, officers who attended very selective programs exhibit very little divergence by gender in their continuation patterns (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Gender-Specific Continuation Patterns Among Army Officers Graduating From very selective Undergraduate Programs

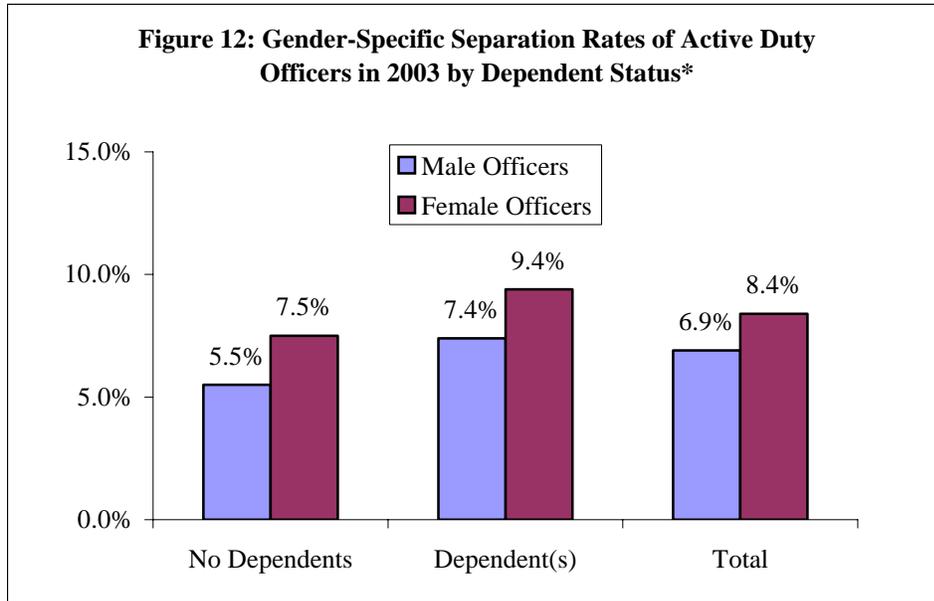
Male and Female Graduates of Very Competitive Undergraduate Institutions Continue at Very Similar Rates

Share of Year Group 1994 Graduates From Very Competitive Undergraduate Institutions Remaining by Sex



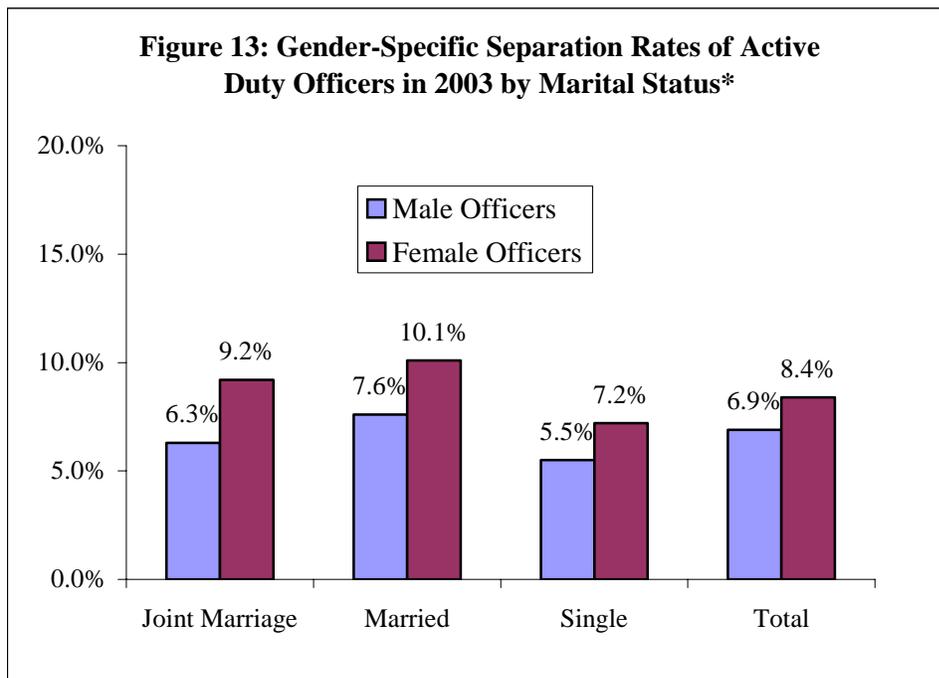
*Source: E.C. Wardynski, and L.B. Gallagher, *Competitive Category Officer Continuations: A look at female Army officer retention* (OEMA, Department of Social Sciences, United States Military Academy, 2003).

Family Status. Figure 12 indicates that women officers with dependents separate at a considerably higher rate (9.4%) than males with dependents (7.4%). The figure also shows that separation rates of female officers without dependents (7.5%) are similar to those of male officers with dependents (7.4%). The lowest separation rates are for male officers without dependents (5.5%).



* Source: Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC), *Fiscal Year 2003 Commissioned Officer Separation Rates for Active Duty and SELRES* (February, 2004).

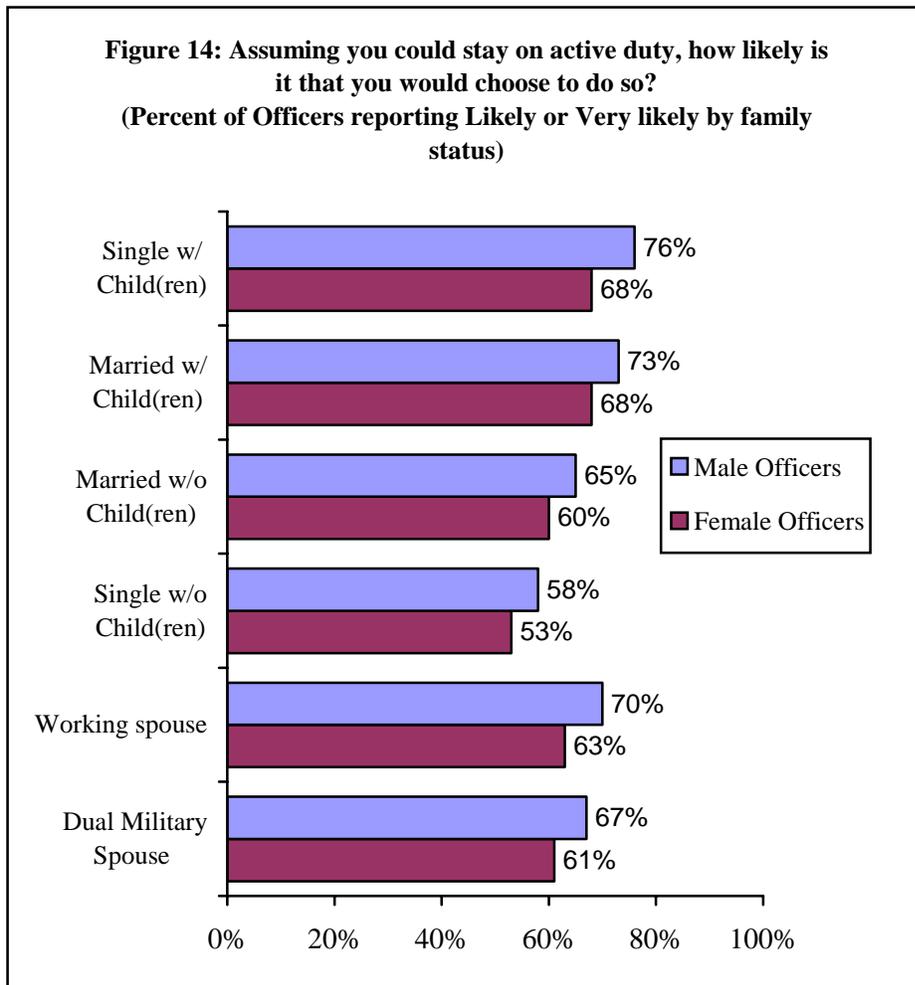
Figure 13 shows that, in 2003, married female officers had higher rates of separation (10.1%) than married male officers (7.6%). Female officers in dual-military marriages had lower separation rates (9.2%), but their rate was still significantly higher than male officers in dual military marriages (6.3%)— suggesting that if the military career of one spouse is to be ended, it is most often the woman’s.



* Source: Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC), *Fiscal Year 2003 Commissioned Officer Separation Rates for Active Duty and SELRES* (February, 2004).

Researchers at OEMA suggest that economic factors play a role in explaining the gender difference in retention for those in dual-military marriages.⁶ Military women tend to earn less than military men because they are in lower grades on average, and salary is one factor that dual-military couples no doubt consider when making the decision about which spouse will remain in the military. Figure 13 also indicates that the separation rate of married men in 2003 (7.6%) was higher than that of single women (7.2%). Figure 13 shows single officers of both genders separate at lower rates than their married counterparts.

Figure 14, which displays officer career intentions in April 2004 by family status, indicates that male single officers with children are the group most likely to report an intention to remain in the military, followed by male married officers with children. For officers of both genders, those with dependents—single or married—are more likely to report an intention to stay. This finding is difficult to interpret, given that actual separation data shown earlier in Figure 13 indicates that officers with dependents separate at a higher rate than those without dependents.



* Source: April 2004 Status of Forces Survey of Active-Duty Members:

One plausible explanation for the apparent discrepancy between separations data and intentions data is that many officers with children may have the desire to remain due to military job stability, family benefits and other reasons, but are ultimately unable to balance their military and dependent obligations.

Additional Findings From the Literature. Though marriage and child rearing are key life events for both women and men, there tend to be greater cultural expectations for women than for men to act as primary caregivers for young children. These cultural expectations and their impact on working women were specifically acknowledged in the language of Public Law 103-3, the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA):

...due to the nature of the roles of men and women in our society, the primary responsibility for family caretaking often falls on women, and such responsibility affects the working lives of women more than it affects the working lives of men. — (Section 2: Findings and Purposes)

When retention decisions are placed in this context, some degree of gender difference in separation rates at the 5-8 years of service period—precisely the age window when most college educated American women with children become mothers for the first time—could be expected. In a recent study of job continuity among new mothers, more than one-fourth of those who had full-time jobs before childbirth had not returned to work within 6 months after childbirth.⁷ Additionally, in their work on the wage penalty associated with motherhood, sociologists Budig and England note that many women interrupt full-time employment to spend time at home caring for children, and many others trade higher wage jobs “for mother-friendly jobs that can easily be combined with parenting.”⁸

The role of family-related factors in female Servicemembers’ decisions to separate is prominent in two recent retention studies of female Air Force personnel. For her 2002 study entitled “Winning the Retention Wars,” prepared for the Commandant of the Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, Lt. Colonel Laura DiSilverio mailed questionnaires focusing on influences on the career decision to 1000 recently departed female Air Force officers.⁹ The study author, whose questionnaire generated a response rate of nearly 60%, rank ordered the major reasons these female officers left the Air Force. The reasons most frequently rated as critical or significant in the decision to leave were a desire to spend more time with family (41%), and a desire for geographic stability (41%). Other prominent reasons included wanting to stay home with children (27%), dissatisfaction with USAF leadership (27%), and the desire to start a family (24%).

Similarly, Pierce’s 1998 study of 525 female Air Force veterans of the first Persian Gulf War found that, along with those experiencing financial strain and those who had developed a negative view of military service through their deployment, female Servicemembers who gave birth to a child within a two-year window from the beginning of the war showed the highest rates of separation from the military.¹⁰

In a 2001 study of the impact of deployment on Navy mothers, Kelly et al. 2001 report that, regardless of deployment experience, one-fourth to one-third of Navy mothers cited difficulty balancing work and family domains as a reason for their decision to leave the service.¹¹

V. FOCUS GROUPS RESULTS: UNIT CLIMATE’S IMPACT ON RETENTION

In all Service member focus groups in which the question was posed and data were recorded (n =36), there were participants who believed unit climate affects retention. As one junior enlisted male put it, “if [you’re] not happy where you work, you won’t stay.” In some groups,

participants offered further elaboration on the specific unit climate characteristics that they believed impacted retention. These were:

- Leadership (recorded in 8 groups)
- Respect (recorded in 2 groups)
- Differential treatment (recorded in 2 groups)

The following comment, from a junior enlisted female, provides an example of the influence of these factors on the retention decision:

“I think the whole reason I’m not staying is because my chief does not like me. He’s held me back from promotion.”—Junior enlisted female, USN

Assessment of current unit climate. Comments on unit climate were recorded in 47 Service member focus groups. Most groups had a mix of participants, some of who provided positive assessments of their unit’s current climate, and others whose assessments were less than positive. Positive comments regarding unit climate were recorded in about four-fifths (79%) of Service member groups, and negative comments were recorded in nearly all (98%) groups. Table 17 displays the most frequently recorded positive and negative themes with respect to unit climate.

Table 17: Focus Groups’ Assessment of Unit Climate

Positive unit climates themes	Percentage of groups in which theme emerged
Leadership	42%
Morale (is high)	38%
Absence of Harassment & Assault	29%
Fair Treatment	25%
High Level of Trust	23%
Cohesion & Camaraderie	17%
Negative unit climates themes	Percentage of groups in which theme emerged
Leadership	54%
Differential Treatment	46%
Harassment and Assault	40%
Lack of Trust	35%
Morale (is low)	33%
Internal Conflict	31%
Job Gender Context	27%
Respect, Recognition, & Tolerance	27%

These themes, and whether they were viewed as contributing to a good or a poor unit climate, are briefly described below.

1. Leadership

Participants who spoke positively about leadership at their unit mentioned that leadership is willing to understand and listen to everyone, that they are encouraged to educate themselves, and

that the leadership is fair and caring. One junior enlisted male explained that leadership has “an open door policy at all times.”

Participants who felt dissatisfied with leadership at their unit reported that leaders are often out of touch with subordinates, that they only listen to and care about everyone to the extent that it benefits them, that leaders embarrass and disrespect subordinates, and that they bestow special treatment on some subordinates. One female senior officer expressed that:

“Leaders lose focus on what is going on in unit...how can a commander know what is going on if you don't visit the work centers?”— Senior officer female, USAF

Other Service members felt dissatisfied with the level of respect and recognition they receive from leadership and subordinates. Some lower ranking Service members felt that their work was unappreciated and unrecognized, while some in the higher ranks felt that the newer generations of subordinates failed to respect leadership, their duties, and the Core Values.

2. Morale

Overall, participants describing unit morale as “good” did not explain why they felt this way. One exception was a Army Reservist who expressed that her unit’s high morale:

“has a lot to do with deployment. You're around each other all the time.”
— Junior enlisted female, USAR

Participants describing unit morale as low felt that it needs improvement and is an indirect result of other causes such as poor leadership, differential treatment, and lack of respect.

3. Harassment and Assault

While slightly more than one-fourth (23%) of Service member focus groups mentioned that harassment and assault do not occur in the unit, two-fifths (40%) of Service member focus groups mentioned that sexual harassment and sexual assault do occur.

Among those reporting that harassment and assault do not occur in the unit, one senior enlisted female explained:

“I don't think I've ever heard of anybody mentioning anything related to sexual assault or anything like that, and I've been here 8 years.”—Senior enlisted female, USAR

Consistent with this comment, another junior officer stated:

“I don't perceive a problem so much [with sexual assault in the Coast Guard].”
—Junior officer, USCG

In contrast, several Service members recounted instances in which they were victims of harassment. One junior enlisted female recounted an incident in which her supervisor sexually harassed her:

“I had a tech SGT [who] was a real bear for everyone on the flight. He said, 'If I wasn't married, I'd sleep with you.' He was my direct supervisor for a particular shift. It got to the point that I got other people involved. He made me feel really uncomfortable. He kicked my chair and I asked him to stop. He kicked it again and I asked him to stop again. He pulled my hair and I kept asking him to stop. For some reason out of nowhere, he slapped my butt - this was the absolute breaking point.”— Junior enlisted female, USAR

4. Fair treatment

One-fourth (25%) of Service member focus groups contained at least one participant who agreed that people in the unit are treated fairly. When asked to rate how fairly people were treated, the majority of individual participants reported that people were treated on an average level. Supporting the idea that people are treated fairly in the unit, one junior enlisted female explained that gender does not play a role:

“It doesn't matter if you're male or female; you're going to be punished.”

Participants who chose to discuss leadership's treatment of subordinates often felt there were cliques of people who receive preferential treatment, especially regarding career opportunities. For example, one junior enlisted male suggested:

“If you're part of the clique, you get the best TDY/deployments.”
— Junior enlisted male, USAF

A handful of Service members felt that there was differential treatment by gender. For example, one senior enlisted female mentioned that there are still:

“...females that can't get on ships and aren't eligible for promotion because they can't get the sea time. They are behind the curve.”—Senior enlisted female, USCG

5. Trust

Participants in approximately one-fourth (23%) of Service member focus groups reported that their unit has a high level of trust. When asked if unit members trust one another and their supervisors, most participants felt that this level of trust was at least at an average level.

Some participants who reported unfavorable unit climate described their unit as having a low level of trust. Participants who raised this issue of expressed that they did not know who to trust in their unit.

6. Cohesion and camaraderie

Slightly less than one-fifth (17%) of Service member focus groups mentioned a high level of cohesion and camaraderie when describing the unit climate. Participants mentioned that their co-workers care about and look out for one another. As one junior female officer put it:

“We love the people that we work with. The people that we're surrounded with make the situation bearable or enjoyable.”—Female junior officer

The following additional themes emerged within groups containing participants who characterized their unit climate as poor:

1. Internal Conflict

When describing the unit climate, participants in about one-third (31%) of groups mentioned conflict within the unit, and that this aspect of their unit's climate needed improvement:

“[There is] some internal conflict in my unit. I am the only female Staff NCO, and there is someone that I am not speaking too and I don't know why.” – Senior enlisted female, USMC

2. Job Gender Context

Participants in 12 female groups (but only one male group) described gender bias or uneven gender composition as a negative feature of their unit's climate:

“It's a male environment. We've been here long enough to know how to adapt.”
– Senior enlisted female, USA

“NCO's here are openly sexist. It's a just different mentality here. Everybody notices it. There's a stigma attached because you are a female.”
– Senior enlisted female, USA

“Some career fields are predominantly male vs. female. You can have an environment where there is a [hostile] environment - and if leadership doesn't do anything to change it, you're less apt to step forward and say something - because you know senior leadership doesn't care.”— Senior enlisted female, USAF

3. Respect, Recognition, & Tolerance

Participants in roughly one-fourth of female (27%) of groups stressed the need for greater recognition of personnel accomplishments to improve unit climate:

“Recognition - people felt they weren't getting any. It's not so much getting a plaque or a certificate. It's just being told they're doing a good job. They need to be stroked...they need it bad. – Senior enlisted female, USAF

Table 17 displays unit climate perceptions recorded within in female officer groups only.

Table 17: Perceptions of unit climate within female officer groups

Positive unit climates themes	Number and percent of groups in which theme emerged	
	Female officer groups (n= 9)	
Leadership	4	44%
Absence of Harassment & Assault	3	33%
Morale (is high)	2	22%
Cohesion & Camaraderie	2	22%
Negative unit climate themes	Female officer groups (n= 9)	
Respect, Recognition, & Tolerance	3	33%
Leadership	2	22%
Differential Treatment	2	22%
Harassment and Assault	2	22%
Lack of Trust	2	22%
Internal Conflict	2	22%

Compared with female Service member groups overall, participants in female officer groups were less likely to stress negative unit climate themes. Perhaps because they have more direct responsibility for unit climate issues, or because they have more authority and status in the organization, female officers in DACOWITS focus groups appeared to perceive unit climate more favorably than their female enlisted counterparts.

VI. RESEARCH FINDINGS: PERCEPTIONS OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCEMENT

In addition to commissioning source, education, and family status, gender differences in retention rates may also be affected by the extent to which males and females diverge in their perceptions about opportunities for advancement in the armed forces. To the extent that female officers perceive their career advancement opportunities are limited in the military, this could contribute to a decision to terminate their careers at lower grades than men, on average.

For example, a recent RAND study shows that female officers continue to be concentrated in occupations perceived to offer more limited long-term career opportunities (i.e., support occupations).¹² The study, which employed a customized cohort-based data file prepared by DMDC, found that although women's concentration in support occupations has no impact on their career opportunities up to the O-4 level, female officers believe that their traditional non-combat roles limit their chances to advance to senior ranks (O6 and above).

During the development of the *March 2003 SOFA*, the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) requested that a set of items on perceptions of advancement opportunities be included on the survey. Items of this type have been shown to be predictive of an individual's likelihood of remaining with an organization.

Service members were asked to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements about their military career and Service:

- I will get the assignments I need to be competitive for promotions
- My Service's evaluation/selection system is effective in promoting its best members
- If I stay in the Service, I will be promoted as high as my ability and effort warrant.

The response options ranged from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. Table 18 presents the percentages of Service members who agreed with the statements regarding their advancement opportunities.

Table 18: Service members' Perceptions of Opportunities in Military (Percent reporting Agree or Strongly agree)*

	Total		Officer		Enlisted	
	Enlisted	Officer	Female	Male	Female	Male
I will get the assignments I need for promotion	36%	55%	51%	56%	32%	36%
My Service's evaluation/selection system is effective	24%	37%	32%	38%	24%	24%
I will be promoted as high as my ability and effort warrant	50%	51%	50%	51%	52%	50%
<i>Margins of error do not exceed</i>	± 2	± 2	± 4	± 2	± 4	± 2

* Source: March 2003 SOFA

More officers than enlisted members agreed that they will get the assignments they need to get promotions (55% vs. 36%) and that their Service's evaluation/selection system is effective (37% vs. 24%). For both officer and enlisted members, there were no statistically significant differences by gender, suggesting that male and female Service members genders feel similarly about their military opportunities in these three areas.

Findings from the 2000 Exit Survey. The most recent DoD-wide exit survey, administered to personnel leaving the military, was conducted in 2000. Among other questions, survey respondents were asked to evaluate 31 reasons that might have influenced their decision to separate. DMDC analysts then rank ordered those factors that male and female officers most frequently reported influencing their decision "to a great extent" or "to a very great extent". Among female officers, the most frequently cited reasons for leaving were:

- Overall job satisfaction (50%)
- A desire to settle in a particular location (38%)
- Other reason (25%)
- Not getting desirable or appropriate assignments (24%)
- Pay and allowances (20%), and continue my education (20%), tied for 5th

Among male officers, the five most frequently cited reasons to leave were:

- Desire to start second career before becoming too old (44%)
- Overall job satisfaction (43%)
- Desire to settle in a particular location (41%)
- Pay and allowances (29%)
- Promotion/advancement opportunities (29%).¹³

Conspicuously absent in these rankings of influential factors (but stressed heavily in other research reviewed for this report) are family related issues, such as “desire to start a family”, or “amount of time spent away from family”. These were not included among the 31 response options for this question in the 2000 Exit Survey.¹⁴ While the survey did include “family problems at home”, and “family wanted me to separate” as possible responses, these categories are not synonymous with the more neutrally worded options suggested above. Additionally, based on the DACOWITS focus group data, they do not adequately capture the essence of what many female Servicemembers with plans to leave appear to believe: namely, that military service and raising a family are often incompatible responsibilities. It is also possible that the general category of “job satisfaction,” which was female officers’ chief reason for separating, captured respondents who were not satisfied with their work environment in their military job. However, in the civilian literature, satisfaction with work-family balance issues is a major component of women’s overall job satisfaction.¹⁵

Another question on the 2000 Exit Survey asked: “which is the most important factor we could have improved that would have made you stay?” Female officers cited “quality of leadership” most frequently (21%) out of a list of 39 possible choices. A group of several factors were essentially tied for second, each accounting for between 6% and 7% of responses. These included:

- Basic pay
- Level of manning in your unit
- Amount of enjoyment from your job
- Location or station of choice
- Amount of personal/family time you have
- Co-location with military spouse.

The next section places women’s military participation within the context of trends in the civilian labor force.

VII: RESEARCH FINDINGS: WOMEN'S CIVILIAN WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION AND FACTORS AFFECTING THEIR RETENTION

Work and Family Issues. Over the past three decades labor force participation rates between men and women in the U.S. have been converging. In 2002, approximately 74% of men and 60% of women were in the labor force. For women, this represents an increase of 17% since 1970.¹⁶ This steady climb in women's labor force participation has changed family-work patterns in America; in 2000, both parents were employed in 44% percent of families with children, compared to 35% in 1975.¹⁷ During this same period, the labor force participation rate of mothers with children under age 18 has risen from 47% to 72%.¹⁸

While these data indicate that nearly three-fourths of mothers today are balancing family responsibilities with employment, childbirth remains a major milestone in the life course of women, and many interrupt their careers to devote their full attention to it, at least temporarily.¹⁹ In part because of this, the employment status and jobs held by women in the civilian sector change more often over time than those of men. For example, in a recent longitudinal study of the careers of teachers, the birth of the first child was a primary factor contributing to female teachers' decisions to leave the work force. The study found that in the teaching profession, married female teachers were twice as likely to leave the work force as their unmarried counterparts, and female teachers with newborn children were 8 times more likely to leave as those without newborn children. The birth of a child is also a primary factor in the separation decisions of female employees within other civilian occupations.²⁰

Timing of childbirth is also a critical factor in women's decisions to leave the civilian workforce. A 2003 study examining the mean age of American mothers found that, on average, American women who had their first child in 2000 were about 25 years of age— more than 3 years older than women's average age at first birth in 1970 (21 years of age). Over the past three decades, the average age of mothers for all births also steadily shifted upward, from 24.6 years of age to 27.2 years of age. Still, more than half of all births still occur to women in their twenties.

Among women in the civilian labor force, full-time work status before pregnancy is strongly related to employment decisions after childbirth. A study using the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth found that 60% of women who work full-time before childbirth continue to work at the same job after the child is born.²¹ Parenting conditions during the period before the mother's return to the workforce also play a key role in the mother's well being over time.²² For example, childcare and associated psychological strains can precipitate the consideration of a career change or separation from the workforce for mothers.

Other Factors Affecting Civilian Women's Retention. Though the civilian literature heavily emphasizes family-related issues in the labor force participation of women, non family-related factors have been shown to affect women's work-related decisions also. For example, a recent study of women working within the health care sector found that perceptions of career opportunities and advancement in their organizations contributed significantly to employees' job satisfaction and to their decisions about whether to stay or leave.²³

As noted earlier in reference to findings from the 2000 Military Exit Survey, "job satisfaction" is a general measure that has multiple dimensions. In the research literature on the civilian workforce, job satisfaction is a consistent predictor of retention. For women, work-

family balance issues are, in turn, a major component of job satisfaction, but other factors are also important. For example, in a study of pharmacists working in a large medical center, researchers found that challenge and job autonomy were important “intrinsic” factors that influenced the job satisfaction of female pharmacists, while staffing, compensation, relationships with co-workers and job security were the most important “extrinsic” factors. The researchers concluded that, for workers satisfied with the intrinsic factors of their job, action by management to improve the extrinsic factors would reduce turnover and increase retention.

Similarly, in a study of female academic faculty (a career sector in which turnover of women exceeds that of men both pre and post-tenure), researchers identified the following factors as significant predictors of women’s job satisfaction, depending on tenure status:

- Departmental climate (for all women)
- Perception of salary equity (for tenured women)
- Relationship with colleagues (for non-tenured women)
- Mentorship (for non-tenured women).

That the elements of women’s job satisfaction differed depending on tenure status suggests that women at varying points in their career may emphasize different kinds of factors in their decisions.

VII. ORGANIZATIONAL BEST PRACTICES IN THE CIVILIAN SECTOR

There is a growing body of literature demonstrating that “work-life” initiatives (i.e., organizational programs, facilities and policies that help employees balance work and non-work roles) not only benefit employees, but can also positively impact important organizational outcomes such as employee performance, attendance and retention. For example, a study using national survey data found that workers with access to family-responsive policies reported greater commitment (i.e., personal attachment to the organization) and lower intention to quit. The relationship of access to work-life policies and programs (e.g., child care information referral) and these outcomes was particularly strong among workers who had young children.²⁴

Other recent studies of the American workplace have found that employee’s perceived organizational support, (i.e., employees’ beliefs about whether or not their organization is concerned with their well-being) has real consequences for employers. Workers reporting higher perceived organizational support (POS) also report higher levels of commitment and loyalty to their organization.²⁵ While many factors contribute to employees’ POS, including the quality of leadership and support from supervisors, one straightforward method to enhance employee’s POS is for organizations to adopt policies and programs that recognize employees’ needs to balance work and non-work responsibilities. The norm of reciprocity— the recognition that the relationship between Servicemembers and the military is characterized by a mutual exchange of sacrifice and reward— is the conceptual foundation of DoD’s human resource strategy articulated in the *New Social Compact*.²⁶

Providing flexibility and resources that allow employees to balance work and family is a strategy used by many organizations to successfully recruit and retain qualified female employees.²⁷ For example, a recent study found that parental leaves and childcare spending accounts considerably reduced turnover among employees following childbirth.²⁸ Civilian employers have increasingly recognized that organizational support is necessary to help manage time shortages, scheduling dilemmas, and conflict between work-family domains,²⁹ and that “expecting employees to manage their non-work difficulties alone, with no involvement by the organization, is not effective”.³⁰ Within the civilian sector, some of the more common work-life initiatives designed to help employees balance work and non-work responsibilities include:

- Childcare support
- Flexible or non-standard work schedule options (i.e., part-time, flex-time)
- Extended leave programs.

Though not all work-life policies and programs are realistic in a military context, the following firms and policies are among those cited in *Best Practices of Private Sector Employers* by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.³¹

- *Aetna, Inc. (Aetna)*, is one of the country's largest insurance and financial service organizations, headquartered in Connecticut. Aetna has approximately 30,000 employees. Aetna provides its employees numerous work arrangement options including compressed workweeks, job sharing, and flexible hours, and telecommuting. Aetna allows employees to take up to six months leave without pay after the birth or adoption of a child, or to care for a seriously ill parent, spouse or child. Childcare and elder care resources, consultations, and referral programs are also available to employees.
- *PPG Industries, Inc. (PPG)*, is a manufacturer and distributor of glass coatings and chemical products, headquartered in Pennsylvania. PPG, which has approximately 31,000 employees, offers child care resources and referral service to assist employees find childcare service that best fits their needs. To meet employees’ personal and family needs, PPG provides flexible work options.
- *SAS Institute*, a fairly large (9,300 employees) international software company with an over-arching interest in retaining highly qualified, technically-skilled workforce, has been lauded for its extensive child care programs, which include on- and off-campus child care facilities, subsidized child care at local daycare centers, and a family leave program for new parents. Flexible work hour programs are also provided to meet employees’ family care needs.

Additional practices include:

- **Sabbatical programs:** A recent RAND analysis found that a facilitated Return to Service (RTS) program— which would provide personnel who have left the military an opportunity to return to service—would have a relatively high return on

investment (ROI). Sabbatical programs “may mitigate the effect of a challenging career path...and assist in sustaining the long term health [of the force].”³²

- *The Social Compact*: DoD’s overall human resource strategy for the 21st is focused on the shared responsibility and commitment between the Department of Defense, Service members and their families. The *Social Compact* provides a comprehensive review of best practices for maintaining strong relationships between employing organizations and their work forces, and articulates the Department’s commitment to helping military personnel manage work-life stress, including underwriting family support as a government responsibility.³³

VIII. SUMMARY

It is important to note that work-life programs and family responsive polices may do little to offset retention disincentives such as poor leadership, lack of perceived opportunities for advancement, unfavorable or hostile work environments, or perceptions of differential treatment among employees. On balance however, there is significant evidence to suggest that work-life initiatives can help organizations succeed in retaining skilled employees in whom they have invested significant resources during recruitment and training.

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