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**EMPLOYMENT
RESEARCH SERIES**

THE FORCE BEHIND THE FORCE

Defining and Enabling Job Portability Employment
Solutions for Military Spouses

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THE FORCE BEHIND THE FORCE SERIES
JOB PORTABILITY RESEARCH BRIEF | JUNE 2018



Prudential

About “The Force Behind the Force” Series

The Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF), as part of its broader employment research efforts, and with the generous financial support and collaboration of Prudential Financial, Inc., is exploring the topic of military spouse employment. This paper marks the second iteration in a series of hands-on products geared to human resource professionals, hiring managers, C-Suite executives, philanthropists, and nonprofit leaders interested in hiring military spouses. The initial three-part suite of research included:

- **BUSINESS CASE:** an overview of military spouse demographics and the business case to hire them;
- **PROFILES:** case studies of military spouses that demonstrate some of the common employment difficulties they encounter, and
- **TRAINING MATERIALS:** for human resource professionals who wish to learn more about recruiting and hiring military spouses

The newest suite of products in “The Force Behind the Force” Series will include:

- **RESEARCH BRIEF** defining career portability, providing recommendations for employers
- **INFORMATION** to help military spouses and employers better understand issues related to Status of Forces Agreements (SOFA) and working overseas
- **TOOLKIT** for employers on enabling job portability

About the Authors

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Deborah Bradbard is a Senior Research Associate at IVMF at Syracuse University focused on veteran and military spouse employment and military financial readiness and transition. She served as the Director of Research and Policy at Blue Star Families and one of the primary authors of the 2013 and 2014 Blue Star Families Annual Lifestyle Survey. Her work on military families and military financial literacy have been cited by the White House, members of Congress, CNN, the Center for Deployment Psychology, and the Defense Center of Excellence (DCoE). Dr. Bradbard previously worked as a consultant at Booz Allen Hamilton developing products focused on military mental health issues including PTSD, suicide, substance abuse, and traumatic brain injury. Dr. Bradbard received her Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology from Auburn University.

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Rosalinda Maury is the Director of Applied Research and Analytics at IVMF at Syracuse University. She has worked on numerous projects, including the effects of personal financial mismanagement behaviors, training needs assessment, workload assessment, job and occupational analysis, equal pay for equal work, job compatibility assessment, and factors effecting military spouse and veteran employment. She has extensive experience in survey development and worldwide data collection, and has been responsible for developing, implementing and managing surveys for data collection on the large and small scale, for organizations and government sectors. Her work has been featured in numerous publications and she has presented at various professional conferences. Maury received her Master of Science in Psychology from the University of Texas at San Antonio.



“THE FORCE BEHIND THE FORCE” SERIES

Prudential Financial Inc. has committed to recruit, hire, and retain its military spouse employees. As part of this commitment they have invested in learning, developing, leading, and disseminating best practices related to military spouse employment. Toward this end, Prudential Financial Inc. along with the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) at Syracuse University, in 2016, published a three-part-series entitled “The Force Behind the Force” which focused on the business case for hiring military spouses and identifying best practices for recruiting and employing them.

This unique series targets hiring managers, human resource professionals and executives interested in hiring military spouse employees. Accessible online, the series provides information for companies to learn about military spouse employees and informs those who plan to initiate, expand or improve their military spouse hiring initiatives. The previously published papers in this series include:

- ① **The Force Behind the Force: A Business Case for Leveraging Military Spouse Talent**—this paper outlines attributes and characteristics of military spouses relevant to the business environment. Military spouses bring attributes such as resiliency, adaptability, education, resourcefulness, team-orientation, entrepreneurial spirit, and social awareness, all of which contribute to successful performance in competitive business environments.¹
- ② **The Force Behind the Force: Case Profiles of Successful Military Spouses Balancing Employment, Service, and Family**—this paper includes the personal experiences of eight dynamic military spouses selected to discuss their personal experiences surrounding employment during their time affiliated with the military. The case studies highlight the strategies many military spouses use to maintain their employment. This report describes military lifestyle barriers that impact military spouse resumes, and how those barriers impact employers’ perceptions about their potential fit for a position. This report provides recommendations to help Human Resource (HR) professionals better assess military spouse candidates.²
- ③ **The Force Behind the Force: Training, Leveraging, and Communicating about Military Spouses as Employees**—this training guide is designed for hiring managers and human resource professionals interested in hiring military spouses. This tool illustrates the unique strengths and challenges that military spouses bring to the workforce and provides key insights and ways to train, leverage talent, and communicate when employing military spouses.³

This prior work focused on recruiting and hiring military spouse employees; retaining them is often a more challenging goal for employers.

Notably, employers have often relied on a template borrowed from veteran hiring initiatives to build their military spouse initiatives. While this has the advantage of providing an existing framework, it has minimized the impact of relocation on military spouse retention. Specifically, because veterans generally seek employment once their military commitment has ended, they are no longer bound by the constraints associated with mandatory military orders. Military spouses, on the other hand seek employment throughout the duration of their service members' career and therefore continue to relocate while they simultaneously seek employment. This difference requires knowledge and awareness on the part of the employer by proactively treating military spouses as distinct from veterans.⁴

Given this distinction it is not surprising that the research literature on spouse employment and case study interviews with military spouses consistently shows that spouses have difficulty maintaining employment when they relocate, raising some key questions: can improving or increasing the options for military spouse career portability positively impact the unemployment and underemployment situation for military spouses? What are the issues that impact career portability and how can employers retain their military spouse employees when they relocate?

THE CURRENT RESEARCH: CAREER PORTABILITY FOR MILITARY SPOUSES

Upcoming work in "The Force Behind the Force" series will focus on these career portability questions which, thus far, have received little empirical or practical focus. The current research will explore how relocation impacts military spouses, and begins to identify policies, procedures, and practices employers can adopt to enable job portability solutions.

The hope is that this work will strengthen Prudential Financial Inc.'s own job portability efforts, but also encourage other companies to develop their internal policies and procedures related to portability to collectively improve the military spouse employment rates. An overview of this next phase of research focused on career portability is provided below.

Given that very little research exists on the topic of job portability, this research is considered exploratory in nature and will utilize multiple methods to gather information about career portability. Those methods will include focus groups with military spouses, surveys and interviews with employers, and an overview of existing work relevant to the topic of career portability.

The goals of this project are to **(1)** provide a definition of career portability, **(2)** identify the range of portability challenges encountered by both employers and military spouses, and **(3)** to develop resources, guidelines, and frameworks that inform and assist employers, policy makers, and military spouses alike in creating portable career pathways.

NEXT STEPS FOR DEFINING JOB PORTABILITY





THE CURRENT RESEARCH IS INTENDED TO HELP

- ✓ Companies who hire military spouses or other employees that they would like to retain
- ✓ Companies who employ military spouses or other employees who are likely to move frequently
- ✓ Companies who want to develop policies, procedures and protocols to assist their employees when they relocate
- ✓ Companies who are trying to determine how to scale their military spouse hiring initiatives (e.g., some companies may wish to target military spouse employees only for those positions that can be portable)
- ✓ Companies who are willing to assess and adapt their open positions and job descriptions and opportunities to include options such as remote work, telework, or telecommuting
- ✓ Companies who have the flexibility to consider portable alternatives to full-time employment such as part-time employment or 1099 employment
- ✓ Companies who have an existing spouse employment initiative that may be improved if job portability is addressed



WHAT IS CAREER PORTABILITY AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

BACKGROUND

As a result of their service members' military orders, relocation is unavoidable for many military spouses. On average, active duty families move every two years, often crossing state lines and in some cases relocating overseas.⁴

For military spouses who want or need to work, each time a service member is required to relocate, the spouse is faced with the prospect of finding new employment in a new location, often in the absence of an existing network or support system. Spouses within career fields that require licensure or state-based certifications may be required to recertify each time they move to a new state to qualify for employment in their field. Some spouses find they are unable to meet licensure requirements, either due to the cost or the time involved. Even for spouses seeking employment who do not require licensure or state-based certifications, finding employment becomes particularly challenging when the duration of a relocation is so compressed that the requirements cannot be met prior to their next relocation.⁵

The short duration and unexpected nature of some military moves is a deterrent to seeking employment at all, and may curtail the time a spouse is able to work at each location if

the ability to start a new job is delayed or protracted.⁶ When spouses leave employment, they also may lose seniority, opportunities to accrue benefits or increased pay, reduce personal debt, or advance professionally. Employers can play a key role in alleviating these difficulties to the extent they can enable continuity of employment across locations.

Many military spouses both want and need to work, and to avoid unemployment, some spouses accept underemployment, often working in jobs unrelated to their training or education, outside of their preferred career field, for pay less than their market value, or for part-time work even when full time work is desired or preferred.⁷ Finally, employers have to re-train high performing employees, reconvene job searches to fill open positions, or onboard new employees when positions are vacant as a result of employees who relocate.

Though multiple efforts have focused on improving the employment prospects for military spouses their unemployment rates have remained consistently high, as much as four times that of similar civilians.⁸ Few of these prior efforts have focused on job portability. Therefore, the current research will attempt to fill a gap by learning how military spouses experience these relocation difficulties, what strategies they use to mitigate them, and how employers can enable continued employment opportunities when a military spouse must relocate.

FOCUS GROUPS: FIRST STEPS IN DEFINING JOB PORTABILITY

Given the limited information that exists about job portability one of the initial goals of this project is to define job portability from the perspective of military spouses. For the first phase of this project we convened a small group of eight spouses who were recruited online to voluntarily participated in their choice of four focus groups via telephone.

The military spouse focus groups suggest that the concept of job portability is likely multi-dimensional, diverse, and unique to each employer/employee relationship.

Later phases of this project will include additional focus groups with military spouse employees and company representatives (including human resource professionals and hiring managers) who can provide insight into the issues and barriers related to career portability. This research will gather additional insight by administering employer surveys and follow-up interviews.

The following variations of job portability were developed directly from the focus group interviews with military spouses and will serve as a working definition of job portability.





NEXT STEPS

Companies who hire military spouses are better prepared to meet the unique needs of these employees to the extent they have clear, established policies, protocols, and procedures to address issues specific to employment and relocation.

Relocation is a major challenge for military spouse employees who move across state lines and/or overseas. There can be variation in **(1)** cost of living, **(2)** availability of positions and/or comparable positions, and **(3)** differences in whether the spouse is able to work based on the agreements outlined by the Department of State, known as Status of Forces Agreements (SOFA).

As noted previously, numerous companies have invested in hiring military spouses but often do not have policies that specifically address if, how, or when their employees may continue working in their organization when they must relocate. In general, there is a dearth of information surrounding career portability, how to remove barriers that preclude it, and how to enact policies that enable portability specifically for military spouses.

THIS CAREER PORTABILITY RESEARCH WILL:

- ✓ Review current and prior research to identify the job portability issues related to military spouses
- ✓ Examine how companies address job portability for non-military affiliated employees
- ✓ Identify career portability issues from the perspective of human resource professionals
- ✓ Identify human resource policies, practices, and priorities related to job portability for military spouses
- ✓ Identify issues associated with Status of Forces Agreements (SOFA) such as key themes, barriers, and policy issues that either enable work while living overseas or present barriers to employment
- ✓ Provide recommendations and future directions for companies, collaborative working groups, legislators, and military spouses
- ✓ Provide tools for employers to identify whether offering portable career options within their organization aligns with their business

The final product in this series will include a practical toolkit that offers suggestions, recommendations, and tools for employers who wish to explore ways to offer portability options to their employees in general but, particularly for military spouses.



CONCLUSION

As companies continue to invest in resources toward hiring and recruiting military spouses, one of the greatest challenges may become how to retain this talent evenly across all locations. Prudential Financial Inc. has recognized that relocation is often a barrier to employment for military spouses and has dedicated resources to strengthen their successful spouse hiring initiatives by focusing on employment issues related to job portability. Their intent is to clarify some of the issues specific to

job portability among military spouses and to develop practical solutions that can be **(1)** applied internally at their own company and **(2)** extended to other employers.

Through identifying the issues related to job portability, a more nuanced discussion can take place among employers with the goal of developing responsive solutions that help military spouse employees maintain their employment while simultaneously benefitting the companies that hire them.



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6. Ibid
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8. Unemployment rates for military spouses are up to four times the rate for similar civilians





ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES AT SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY (IVMF)

The Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) is the first interdisciplinary national institute in higher education focused on the social, economic, education, and policy issues impacting veterans and their families. Through its professional staff and experts, the IVMF delivers leading programs in career, vocational, and entrepreneurship education and training, while also conducting actionable research, policy analysis, and program evaluations. The IVMF also supports communities through collective impact efforts that enhance delivery and access to services and care. The Institute, supported by a distinguished advisory board, along with public and private partners, is committed to advancing the lives of those who have served in America's armed forces and their families. For more information, visit ivmf.syracuse.edu.



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Prudential Financial, Inc. (NYSE: PRU), a financial services leader with more than \$1 trillion of assets under management as of March 31, 2016, has operations in the United States, Asia, Europe and Latin America. Prudential's diverse and talented employees are committed to helping individual and institutional customers grow and protect their wealth through a variety of products and services, including life insurance, annuities, retirement-related services, mutual funds and investment management. In the U.S., Prudential's iconic Rock symbol has stood for strength, stability, expertise and innovation for more than a century. For more information, please visit www.news.prudential.com.

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