



army families federation

AFF SURVEY

September 2016

How we make work...work

“Determination, positivity and flexibility. Being willing to give most anything a go!”

Families often tell AFF about the barriers they face when seeking employment, but AFF was keen to hear from the many spouses who are making work ‘work’ for them and their family. AFF conducted a survey in September 2016 to gain a greater understanding of Army spouses and partners’ reasons for working and the secret to their success. There were **657** responses from spouses/partners in employment.

What is the key to success?

The key theme from respondents was determination, positivity and flexibility. Spouses talked about having a flexible skill set, being open to different types of employment and being determined to make it work.

“Resilience, a skill set or product that is not limited by location, the ability to market yourself successfully, good time management skills, your spouse’s support - and sometimes your own funds to set things up.”

Support from soldier

- 39%** of spouses/partners stated that their soldier’s workload/hours mean they are unable to help, even on an occasional basis.
- 23%** of spouses/partners stated that their soldier is allowed to occasionally work flexibly (e.g. come in late or finish early) to allow them to work.

Spouses and partners of officers seemed to be able to ask for more occasional help than those of other ranks.

Support from the soldier was key in determining whether working as an Army spouse/partner is worth it, with those who stated it was worth it having higher rates of their soldier being able to help them.

“I have taken a lesser paid job that means I do not have to rely on my husband’s help as he is rarely able to help me with school runs.”

Top four challenges in maintaining employment

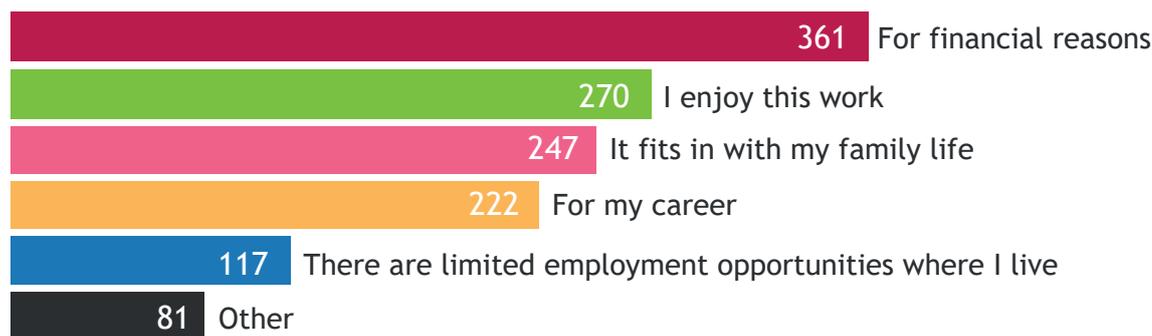
- 55%** cost of childcare
- 49%** lack of appropriate childcare
- 48%** frequent postings
- 47%** lack of family support

Top field of employment for spouses

- 15% administration & secretarial
- 14% other
- 11% teaching & education
- 8% health
- 7% charity/NFP

Main reasons spouses/partners work

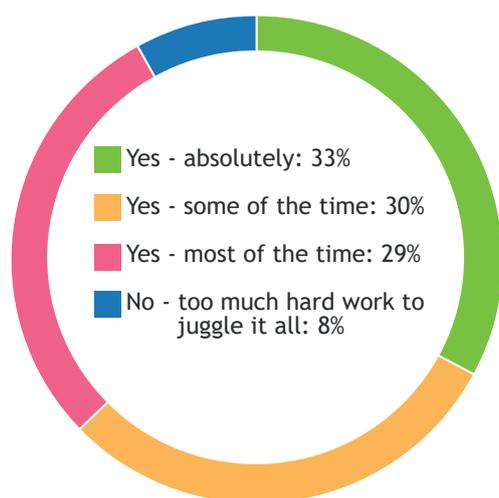
[Could tick all that apply]



"It gives me some 'me' time, nothing to do with the husband or the kids, and this helps keep me sane in this crazy Army life when you can easily feel like a second class citizen!"

"I couldn't imagine not working; it's as strong a part of my identity as the Army is to my husband's."

Working as an Army spouse/partner – is it worth it?



"The Army needs to offer soldiers flexible working and take into account the wages don't allow for a wife to not work. For financial reasons I have to work. There needs to be more support. Allowing the soldiers to do the school run either in the morning or the evening would be a huge help. The Army needs to be more realistic and support families a lot more."

"It's important that those of us who want to work to help support the family financially should be encouraged, not hindered. Although the extended postings to three years would help, the general inflexibility of the Army is the biggest stumbling block and I'm not sure how we would overcome that."

Conclusion

The majority of working spouses/partners who took our survey feel working is worthwhile - not just for financial reasons but also for a sense of identity and independence. However, they do face some significant challenges. Support from the soldier and access to appropriate childcare are key determining factors in ensuring the spouse/partner is not disadvantaged in upholding employment. Whilst flexible working is available to some soldiers, AFF urges the MOD and Army to promote the policy more widely and improve command sensitivity to the growing trend of fair division of childcare responsibilities in a modern family.