Unemployment in military spouses: An exploration of the latent and manifest benefits,
quality of life, and psychological wellbeing

Abstract

The aim of the current study was to explore employment, latent and manifest benefits (LAMB), wellbeing, and quality of life (QoL) in military spouses. Australian military spouses (286 females, 3 males, M age = 29.07, SD = 6.19, age range: 19-50) were contacted through social networking and completed an online questionnaire. Results confirmed that unemployed spouses had reduced access to LAMB, higher levels of distress, and poorer QoL (QoL) than spouses who were employed. Further, the relationship between employment and wellbeing, and employment and QoL was partially mediated by access to LAMB. Financial income was found to be the most important contributor to wellbeing, and status was found to be the most important contributor of QoL. Overall, findings have implications for military outcomes such as retention and readiness, as spouse employment is a significant factor of their wellbeing and QoL which can, in turn, affect the military member.

Unemployment in military spouses: An examination of the latent and manifest
benefits, quality of life, and psychological wellbeing

Unemployment is a prominent social concern in Australia and other industrialised countries (McKee-Ryan, Song, Wanberg, & Kinicki, 2005; Paul & Moser, 2009).

Unemployment research has substantiated that those who were unemployed, defined as jobless and seeking work, experienced damaging effects to their psychological health. The connection between unemployment and psychological wellbeing has been framed within Jahoda's (1981) latent deprivation model and Fryer's (1986) agency restriction model. Jahoda (1981, 1982) postulated that employment provided five latent benefits, being time structure, collective purpose, social contact, status, and enforced activity. Loss, or deprivation, of these latent benefits explains the elevated levels of distress experienced by unemployed persons. Conversely, Fryer (1986) proposed that wellbeing was associated with the manifest benefit of employment, being financial income. Fryer (1995) argued that the central factors that accounted for the decline in wellbeing was that unemployment resulted in poverty, and made planning for the future difficult. These two factors were considered important because they restricted personal agency (Fryer, 1995). Together, Jahoda (1981) and Fryer's (1986) theories provide a comprehensive framework that explain the relationship between levels of psychological wellbeing and categories of employment.

As Jahoda (1981) and Fryer's (1986) theories are complementary, Muller, Creed, Waters, and Machin (2005) developed the Latent and Manifest Benefit scale (LAMB) to test both theories simultaneously. In a review of studies that used the LAMB scale, Muller and Waters (2012) found that deprivation of the latent and manifest benefits was associated with psychological distress. Studies showed that unemployed persons experienced less access to the latent and manifest benefits of employment, and greater psychological distress than those

who were employed (Paul & Batinic, 2010; Selenko, Batinic, & Paul, 2011). Furthermore, a longitudinal study demonstrated that gaining employment significantly improved psychological health, increased financial income, and provided greater access to time structure and social contact (Hoare & Machin, 2010). Additionally, a German study found that financial income, time structure, and social contact mediated the relationship between employment and psychological wellbeing (Selenko et al., 2011).

Investigation of the latent and manifest benefits of employment as individual contributors to wellbeing found that financial income was the most important contributor to explaining wellbeing in unemployed persons (Creed & Bartrum, 2008; Muller, Creed, & Francis, 2004), and low-income earners (Hassall, Muller, & Hassall, 2004). Additionally, longitudinal research found that financial strain was the more influential contributor to distress during the second year of unemployment (Waters & Muller, 2003). Similarly, Hoare and Machin (2006) reported that while the latent benefits accounted for a significant percent of variance in wellbeing, when financial income was controlled the latent benefits did not significantly contribute to the explanation of wellbeing. Creed and Klisch (2005) also found that while financial income was a significant unique predictor of wellbeing, the latent variables were not.

In summary, empirical evidence supported both Jahoda's (1981, 1982) latent deprivation theory and Fryer's (1986, 1995) agency restriction theory confirming that employed persons had greater access to the latent and manifest benefits of employment than unemployed persons, and in turn had higher levels of psychological wellbeing. Research also found that the manifest benefit was an important contributor to wellbeing. Although research has examined the latent and manifest benefits of employment and psychological wellbeing in subpopulations of people who experience high levels of unemployment, this has not been undertaken in military spouses. This is despite the fact that spouses of currently serving

military members are a subgroup of the population who experience high levels of unemployment (Harrell, Lim, Castaneda, & Golinelli, 2004; Hosek, Asch, Fair, Martin, & Mattock, 2002).

In recent years, a growing body of research has addressed the need for military spouses to pursue satisfactory employment. This is because research has shown that spousal employment has implications in military outcomes such as readiness, or preparedness to perform the mission (Enloe, 2000). In assessing readiness, spouse employment is considered a key factor because it is a determinant of spouses' quality of life (QoL) (Decision Engineering Associates, 2002); and spouses who are healthier and happier are better able to support their military member. One study conducted by the Australian Department of Defence found that family satisfaction with the military lifestyle was an important factor for maintaining membership of the Defence Force, and that the Defence Force's way of life affected many spouses employment (Atkins, 2009). When asked about the impact the military member's career had on their employment or career, over half of spouses responded that they had made some employment or career sacrifices, and 15% responded that they were unemployed or that their career had been severely affected by the military member's career.

Despite being implicated in military outcomes, military spouses experience high levels of unemployment and face unique challenges to obtaining and maintaining employment. This is because aspects of the military lifestyle, such as frequently relocating (Atkins, 2009; Castaneda & Harrell, 2008) and being separated from the military member for duties such as deployments and training exercises (Atkins, 2009; Burrell, Adams, Durand, & Castro, 2006; Castaneda & Harrell, 2008), function as barriers to employment. Despite these barriers, many military spouses hold the desire to work. Through interviews, Castaneda and Harrell (2008) asked spouses to explain why they worked. Two-thirds of the sample stated that they worked for a number of financial reasons. Approximately 50% of spouses

interviewed stated that they worked to pay bills and cover basic expenses, and one-third of spouses stated that paying the bills and covering basic expenses was their most important reason to work.

The Current Study

Given that military spouses are a subpopulation who experience high levels of unemployment, the current study will contextualise these experiences within the unemployment literature. Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore access to the latent and manifest benefits of employment, psychological wellbeing, and QoL in military spouses. The following hypotheses are tested in military spouses.

Hypothesis 1. Employment will be associated with higher levels of psychological wellbeing and QoL than unemployment.

Hypothesis 2. The relationship between employment and wellbeing and employment and QoL is mediated through access to latent and manifest benefits of employment.

Hypothesis 3. Financial income will be the most influential contributor to wellbeing and QoL.

Method

Participants

The sample comprised 289 civilian spouses of currently serving full-time members of the Australian Defence Force (286 females, 3 males, M age = 29.19, SD = 6.19, age range: 19-50). One hundred and thirty three indicated that they were unemployed and 156 indicated they were employed (worked at least 1 hour per fortnight). Participation was on a voluntary basis and no incentive was offered as an inducement to participate.

Materials

A questionnaire was developed and included instructions, demographic information, and a set of scales designed to measure wellbeing, QoL, and the latent and manifest benefits of employment.

General health questionnaire (GHQ-12). The GHQ-12 (Goldberg, 1972) comprised 12 items measuring psychological wellbeing on a 4-point Likert scale with response anchors ranging from *better than usual / much more than usual (4)* to *not at all / much less than usual (1)*. Respondents were asked to indicate how they have recently felt on items that pertained to medical and general health variables such as anxiety, depression, cognitive processing, and self-esteem. Items were summed and transformed (score range: one to four) to obtain a global measure of wellbeing; higher scores denoted elevated levels of psychological distress. The GHQ-12 has sound psychometric properties. Goldberg and Williams (1988) reported an alpha coefficient of .85, and Hoare and Machin (2006) reported an alpha coefficient of .91. The alpha coefficient for the current study was .96. The GHQ-12 had been used extensively as a measure of wellbeing within the unemployment research field. Whilst standardised in the United Kingdom, this test has been used in Australian populations. Additionally, GHQ-12 was used as a measure of wellbeing in studies that tested Jahoda (1981) and Fryer's (1984) theories.

World health organisation quality of life-BREF (WHOQOL-BREF). The WHOQOL-BREF (WHOQOL GROUP, 1998) is a shortened version of the WHOQOL-100 and measures QoL across physical health, psychological health, social relationships, and environment domains. QoL in this measure was defined as individuals' perceptions of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns. The WHOQOL-BREF comprised 26 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale, with various response anchors such as *very dissatisfied / not at all (1)* ranging to *very satisfied / an extreme amount (5)*.

Respondents were asked to respond according to the reference frame of 2 weeks. Raw scores were transformed and summed and transformed (score range: 4 to 20) to obtain measures for each domain and global QoL; higher scores denoted higher QoL. The WHOQOL-BREF has sound psychometric properties. Validity was assessed with WHOQOL-100 and high correlations were reported (range: .89 for social relationships to .95 for physical health) (WHOQOL GROUP). Cronbach's alpha values for each domain ranged from .66 (social relationships) to .84 (physical health). The alpha coefficients for the current study were .81 for physical health, .88 for psychological health, .90 for social relationships, .92 for environment, and .96 for overall QoL. WHOQOL-BREF was pilot and field tested in 18 countries including Australia. Developers of the WHOQOL-BREF stated that this measure is acceptable for clinical practise and research uses.

Latent and manifest benefits scale (LAMB). The LAMB scale (Muller et al. 2005) comprised 36-items that measured the latent (time structure, collective purpose, social contact, status, and activity) and manifest (financial income, operationalised as financial strain) benefits of employment. Each subset comprised six items on a 6-point Likert scale, with the response anchors *strongly agree (1)* to *strongly disagree (6)*. Five items were used to measure collective purpose, as one item tapped into fundraising and religion and the current study was interested in the defence community rather than the wider community. Further, five additional status items were used to improve construct validity. Items were summed and transformed (by adding items up and dividing by number of items) to obtain measures of the latent and manifest benefits. Subscale scores ranged from one to six; higher scores denoted greater access to latent benefits and greater financial strain. The internal reliability coefficients for the subscales were .78 for time structure, .88 for collective purpose, .89 for social contact, .84 for status, .76 for activity, and .92 for financial strain (Muller et al., 2005). Cronbach's alpha for the entire scale was .94 (Muller, Creed, Waters, & Machin, 2000). The

alpha coefficient for the current study was .95 for the entire scale. For the subscales, the alpha coefficients were .99 for time structure, .98 for collective purpose, .98 for social contact, .98 for status, .95 for activity, and .99 for financial strain. The LAMB scale was standardised on Australians, and has been used extensively in various populations as a measure to simultaneously test Jahoda (1981) and Fryer's (1984) unemployment theories. Furthermore, the LAMB scale was developed using GHQ-12 as a measure of psychological distress.

Procedure

The study was cross-sectional in design and employed a snowball sampling methodology. A questionnaire was developed utilising *Survey Monkey* and administered electronically through a social networking website (*Facebook; closed group that the author is connected to*). Questionnaires were accessed from a website address and respondents were assured anonymity. The research methodology quantitative. The study was approved by the Griffith University Human Ethics Committee.

Results

Data Cleaning

Residual analysis was performed and six multivariate outliers were removed as scores were not representative of the military spouse population. The QoL physical domain showed negative skewness (standardised skewness = -4.18). Mild violations of homogeneity of variance and covariance were found for the employment groups on QoL and wellbeing measures, and the LAMB subscales. However, MANOVA and linear regression analyses are robust to mild violations (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007) and datum was analysed without transformations. Furthermore, although there were high correlations between variables collinearity diagnostics indicated that multicollinearity in the regression model was not present.

MANOVA and Independent *t*-tests

Employment, wellbeing, and quality of life. A MANOVA was conducted for the employed and unemployed military spouse groups examining wellbeing and the four QoL indicators. There was an overall effect of employment, Hotelling's $T = F(5, 281) = 34.38, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .38$. Independent t -tests were performed to determine whether there was a significant difference between employed and unemployed military spouses for each of the five outcomes. There was a statistically significant difference between groups in responses to wellbeing. Unemployed spouses reported higher levels of distress than employed spouses, $t(287) = 12.89, p < .001, d = 1.52$. There were also significant differences between employed and unemployed spouses for all four QoL indicators. Unemployed spouses reported lower physical health, $t(287) = -9.26, p < .001, d = 1.09$, lower psychological health, $t(283) = -10.28, p < .001, d = 1.21$, poorer social relationships, $t(287) = -10.67, p < .001, d = 1.25$, and poorer environments $t(287) = -10.76, p < .001, d = 1.27$ than employed spouses. According to Cohen's (1988) benchmarks, effect sizes found for the QoL indicators and wellbeing measure were large and meaningful within the unemployment literature. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics.

Employment and latent and manifest benefits of employment. A MANOVA was also performed for the employed and unemployed spouse groups examining the latent and manifest benefits of employment. There was an overall effect for employment, Hotelling's $T = F(6, 282) = 35.53, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .43$. Independent t -tests were performed to determine whether there was a significant difference between employed and unemployed military spouses for each of the LAMB subscales. Unemployed spouses reported less access to time structure $t(285) = -12.40, p < .001, d = 1.45$, collective purpose $t(285) = -13.84, p < .001, d = 1.62$, social contact $t(287) = -12.09, p < .001, d = 1.42$, status $t(287) = -10.46, p < .001, d = 1.24$, and activity $t(287) = -10.00, p < .001, d = 1.18$ than employed spouses. In addition, unemployed spouses reported greater financial strain $t(267) = 13.60, p < .001, d = 1.58$ than

employed spouses. Based on Cohen's (1988) benchmarks, the effect sizes for the LAMB subscales were large and meaningful to the research area. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics.

Correlation and Regression

Correlation was performed to analyse the associations between employment, LAMB, wellbeing, and QoL. Table 3 presents the bivariate correlations. For employment, there was a strong negative correlation with wellbeing and financial strain, and strong positive correlations with the QoL indicators and the latent benefits of employment. This indicated that spouses who were employed had higher levels of wellbeing and QoL, and greater access to the latent and manifest benefits of employment. Strong negative correlations were found for wellbeing, the four QoL indicators, and the latent benefits of employment, indicating spouses who reported lower levels of wellbeing had poorer QoL and less access to the latent benefits of employment. Also, there were strong negative correlations between financial strain and the four QoL indicators and the latent benefits, indicating that spouses who reported greater financial strain has less access to the latent benefits of employment and poorer QoL. Strong positive correlations were found between wellbeing and the manifest benefit of employment indicating spouses who reported lower levels of wellbeing experienced greater financial strain. Strong positive correlations were also found between QoL indicators and the latent benefits indicating spouses who reported poorer QoL had less access to the latent benefits of employment.

Standard multiple regression analyses were performed to determine the extent to which the latent and manifest benefits could account for military spouses' wellbeing and QoL. Overall, 77% of the variance in wellbeing was accounted for by the latent and manifest benefits of employment, $F(6, 282) = 158.15, p < .001, R^2 = .77$. However, only time structure, collective purpose, status, and financial strain were significant independent contributors to

the explanation of wellbeing. As predicted, financial strain was the most important contributor to wellbeing, independently accounting for 1.66% of the variance. For global QoL, 76% of the overall variance was accounted for by the latent and manifest benefits of employment, $F(6, 282) = 151.14, p < .001, R^2 = .76$. Time structure, status, social contact, and financial strain were the significant independent contributors to the explanation of QoL, with status being the most important contributor accounting for 0.86% of the variance. Table 4 presents the regression analysis.

Mediated Regression

Mediated regression analyses were performed to test whether access to the latent and manifest benefits of employment mediated the relationship between employment and wellbeing, and between employment and QoL. The models describing the relationships are presented in Figures 1 and 2. Consistent with Baron and Kenny's (1986) conditions to satisfy the presence of a mediating effect, there was a significant association between: employment and wellbeing (path c) $\beta = .61, t(288) = 12.89, p < .001$; employment and LAMB (path a) $\beta = .57, t(288) = 11.84, p < .001$; and LAMB and wellbeing (path b) $\beta = .83, t(288) = 25.42, p < .001$. Additionally, the association between employment and wellbeing was substantially reduced after the effects of LAMB was controlled, $\beta = .19, t(288) = 4.99, p < .001$, indicating that access to LAMB has an important influence on wellbeing partially mediating the effect of employment. Figure 1 presents the coefficients for the mediating effect. Whether the mediated pathway (path a*b) was statistically significant was tested with bootstrapping technique (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). As the 95% confidence intervals did not pass through zero, the partially mediated effect was deemed statistically significant, $\beta = -.41, 95\% CI [-.48, -.35]$. Thirty-four percent of the variance was accounted for by the mediated pathway, $R^2_{med} = 0.34 (SE = 0.04), 95\% CI [0.26, 0.43]$, and the proportion of the total correlation between

employment and wellbeing that was accounted for by the mediated pathway was 0.68 ($SE = 0.50$) 95% CI [0.60, 0.79].

Similarly, there was a significant association between: employment and QoL (path c) $\beta = .57$, $t(288) = 11.64$, $p < .001$; employment and LAMB (path a) $\beta = .57$, $t(288) = 11.84$, $p < .001$; and LAMB and QoL (path b) $\beta = .85$, $t(288) = 26.75$, $p = .001$. Additionally, the association between employment and QoL (path c') was substantially reduced after the effects of LAMB was controlled, $\beta = .12$, $t(288) = 3.24$, $p = .001$, indicating that access to LAMB had an important influence on QoL partially mediating the effect of employment. Figure 2 presents the coefficients for the mediating effect. Whether the mediated pathway was statistically significant was tested with bootstrapping technique (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). As the 95% confidence intervals did not contain zero, the partially mediated effect was considered statistically significant, $\beta = .44$, 95% CI [.37, .51]. Thirty-one percent of the variance was accounted for by the mediated pathway, $R^2_{med} = 0.31$ ($SE = 0.04$), 95% CI [0.23, 0.39], and the proportion of the total correlation between employment and wellbeing that was accounted for by the mediated pathway was 0.78 ($SE = 0.60$) 95% CI [0.68, 0.90].

Discussion

The current study aimed to explore the relationship between employment and psychological wellbeing, and employment and QoL in spouses of currently serving Australian Defence Force members. In order to achieve this aim, the present study tested whether employed spouses differed from unemployed spouses on wellbeing, QoL, and the latent and manifest benefits of employment; whether access to the latent and manifest benefits mediated the relationship between employment and wellbeing, and employment and QoL; and whether financial income was the most important contributor towards military spouses' wellbeing and QoL.

Differences between Employment and Unemployment

Results of the current study confirmed that there were significant differences between employed and unemployed military spouses' psychological wellbeing and QoL. Employed spouses had higher levels of wellbeing and QoL than spouses who were unemployed. This indicated that employment played an important role in maintaining wellbeing and enhancing QoL. Findings were consistent with Jahoda (1981) and Fryer's (1986) premise that employed persons are psychologically healthier than those who are unemployed. Findings were also consistent with previous research that found significant differences between employed and unemployed persons (Paul & Batinic, 2010; Selenko et al., 2011). Researchers found that unemployed persons experienced higher levels of psychological distress than employed persons (Paul & Batinic, 2010; Selenko et al., 2011).

Results also indicated that there were significant differences between employed and unemployed military spouses' access to the latent and manifest benefits of employment. Employed spouses had greater access to time structure, social contact, collective purpose, status, and activity, and experienced less financial strain than unemployed spouses. This indicated that employment provided both latent functions of employment as well as financial income. Findings support Jahoda (1981) and Fryer's (1986) theoretical arguments that employment provides access to LAMB, whereas unemployment is associated with deprivation of these benefits. Findings were also consistent with previous research that found that those who were employed had greater access to the latent benefits of employment, and experienced less financial strain than those who were unemployed (Paul & Batinic, 2010; Selenko et al., 2011).

Latent and Manifest Benefits of Employment as a Mediator

The current study found that LAMB scores partially mediated the relationship between employment and psychological wellbeing, and partially mediated the relationship between employment and QoL. This indicated that employment contributed to wellbeing and

QoL directly, as well as indirectly through access to LAMB scores. Findings supported both Jahoda (1981) and Fryer's (1986) contentions that employment is associated with wellbeing, because employment provides access to LAMB, which in turn provides psychological wellbeing. Findings were similar to previous research which tested the latent and manifest benefits of employment as mediators between employment and psychological health (Paul, Geithner, & Moser, 2009; Selenko et al., 2011; Šverko, Galić, Seršić, & Galešić, 2008). In investigating hidden employment, described as volunteering, household work and parenting, and occasional or unregistered jobs, Šverko et al. found that latent variables partially mediated the relationship between employment and psychological health in a Croatian unemployed sample. Similarly, Selenko et al. reported that financial income, time structure, and social contact partially mediated the relationship between employment and psychological wellbeing. In investigating Jahoda's model, Paul et al. found that the latent benefits fully mediated the relationship between employment and symptoms of depression in a German sample.

The results of the current study, as well as previous research, suggested that employment contributed to psychological wellbeing and QoL, directly as well as indirectly through access to latent and manifest benefits of employment. Furthermore, findings suggested some benefits of employment, and not others were important for wellbeing and QoL. Indeed, in the current sample of military spouses, time structure, collective purpose, status, and financial income were important contributors to psychological wellbeing, whereas social contact and activity were not. In addition, for military spouses, the current study found that time structure, social contact, status, and financial income were important contributors to QoL, whereas collective purpose and activity were not. It appears that time structure and financial income may be the most important factors for a person's wellbeing and QoL as these variables have been consistent mediators of the relationship between employment and

wellbeing; and often emerge as the most influential determinants of wellbeing. The reason for this could be that time structure and financial income are the most salient factors when one is employed compared to unemployed.

Contribution of Latent and Manifest Benefits to Wellbeing and Quality of Life

The prediction that the manifest benefit of employment, financial income, would be the most influential contributor to military spouses' psychological wellbeing was confirmed. Findings supported Fryer's (1986, 1995) agency restriction theory, which argued that financial income explained the relationship between employment and wellbeing. Fryer argued that earning an income from employment prevented the experience of poverty and allowed future planning. These two factors enabled personal agency, which was essential for maintaining wellbeing. Additionally, findings were consistent with previous research that found financial income was the most influential contributor to wellbeing (Creed & Bartrum, 2008; Hoare & Machin, 2006; Muller, et al 2004; Waters & Muller, 2003). In unemployed samples, financial strain emerged as the most important contributor to psychological distress (Creed & Bartrum, 2008; Hoare & Machin, 2006; Muller, et al 2004). Similarly, longitudinal evidence indicated that for those who were unemployed for more than two years, financial strain was the most influential factor to their experience of psychological distress (Waters & Muller, 2003). Findings were also consistent with previous research that found many military spouses worked predominantly for financial reasons (Castaneda & Harrell, 2008). Through interviews, Castaneda and Harrell found that many spouses worked to pay bills and cover basic expenses, and that this was their most important reason for working.

Despite financial income being the most influential determinant of psychological wellbeing, results did not support the prediction that financial income would be the most significant factor of military spouses QoL. Rather, status emerged as the most important contributor to the explanation of spouses QoL. Results suggested that the latent and manifest

benefits of employment were related in a different way to QoL than wellbeing. Where wellbeing is a psychological indicator, QoL encompasses physical, social, and environmental aspects of a person's life in addition to psychological health. Consequently, QoL may be an indicator of overall meaningfulness. Therefore, within the larger context of military spouses' lives, status may be more important than finances due to the military environment. This may be because the military rank system produces and perpetuates a division of status and prestige (Harrell, 2003). Historically, class and status were factors that epitomised military life (Harrell, 2003); and while the distinction between enlisted members and officers has blurred somewhat, the military is an institution steeped in tradition. Consequently, status remains a significant contributor to having a meaningful military life.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite the significant findings, the current study was constrained by some limitations. Most notably, access to a representative sample of military spouses was limited; therefore, results are not generalisable to the general population of Australian military spouses. Furthermore, the current study utilised measures that were not standardised on Australian military spouses. However, to the author's knowledge no measure of wellbeing, QoL, and latent and manifest benefits have been standardised in this population. Therefore, this is an avenue for future research. It is worth noting that due to the fact that the sample was not representative, and measures were not standardised for use in the population of Australian military spouses, results can only be interpreted as being reflective of the experiences had by spouses who responded to the questionnaire used for this study. Additionally, the current study operationalised employment according to the employment - unemployment dichotomy. Previous studies indicated that research should investigate underemployment to gain a better understanding of the relationship between employment and health, and a better understanding of life as a military spouse (Lim & Schulker, 2010). Therefore, future research into spouses

of Australian Defence Force members could explore underemployment. In addition, future research could explore the concept of meaningfulness. For example, if employment provided the spouse with meaning or purpose, than it is likely that having to relocate may have a more negative impact on wellbeing and QoL than if meaning was derived from other areas of life.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current study found that military spouses who were employed experienced higher levels of physical and psychological health, better quality social relationships and environment, higher levels of psychological wellbeing, and greater access to the latent and manifest benefits of employment than spouses who were unemployed. Additionally, employment contributed to psychological wellbeing and QoL directly and indirectly influenced these variables through access to LAMB scores. Furthermore, financial income and status were found to be key indicators of wellbeing and QoL for military spouses. The implication of these findings is that employment is an essential factor of psychological wellbeing and QoL in spouses of military members who responded to this study. Therefore, these military spouses require support to obtain and maintain employment to counteract the aspects of the military lifestyle such as frequent and disruptive relocations that function as barriers to employment. As spousal health and wellbeing have implications in military outcomes such as readiness and retention of military personnel, perhaps the Department of Defence could implement ways to minimise the impact of military life on spouses' employment and career development.

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