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The Cross-Cultural Adjustment of Male Military Spouses Relocating Overseas

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Abstract

Background

A 2019 demographics report by the Department of Defense recorded male military spouses as 9.1% (54,831) of the overall active-duty military spouse population, while female military spouses represented 90.9% (550,885) (DOD, 2019). Of the abundant military community family programs, most are designed for and utilized by female spouses. In research concerning international military communities, male spouses are often excluded, or responses are too few to be statistically significant to guide program development or theoretical suppositions (Southwell et al., 2016). Subsequently, male military spouses are an understudied and often overlooked subpopulation. Additionally, male spouses have the added burden of underrepresentation, isolation from other male spouses, and stigma related to the gender norms of being a male spouse in a predominate female environment. With one-third of military service members and families experiencing a PCS (Permanent Change of Station) move each year, the obligatory process may involve transitioning to a foreign installation during which an initial stage of cross-cultural adjustment is necessary for the functioning of the service member and expatriate military spouse (Blakely et al., 2012). “Relocation Stress” is identified as one of the top five stressors of military life (Tong et al., 2018). Though mutually beneficial for both the service member and spouse, an OCONUS (Outside the Continental US) relocation can have adverse psychosocial outcomes for the expatriate male military spouse.

Methods

As an exploratory study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight (N=8) expatriate male military spouses at CFAY (Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka), the largest Navy base overseas. CFAY is in the Kanagawa Prefecture of Japan. Using a Transcendental Phenomenological research design, the study aimed to understand the shared experiences of male military spouses on their first foreign PCS. Specifically, the study questioned what psychosocial stressors expatriate male military spouses experienced, their cross-cultural adjustment experiences, coping practices utilized to mitigate psychosocial stressors, and recommended programmatic/policy changes to fit their specific needs.

Results

In response to the dearth of research on male military spouses, the objective of this dissertation was to open a dialogue on the unique experiences of this subpopulation by identifying specific cross-cultural adjustment difficulties, coping practices, psychological stressors, programmatic policy changes, and social supports deemed relevant to male military spouses on foreign installations. The resulting themes and sub-themes were: The Utility of Relevant Support (Informal Supports, Formal Supports, Support Barriers), Stressfulness (PCS Stress, Psychosocial Stress, Environmental Stress), Employment (Employment Experiences & Mobility, Beliefs about Employment & Its Significance, Employment Barriers), The Male Military Spouse Perspective (Parameters, Perceived Differences from Female Spouses, Injured Masculinity), and Adjustment (Joint Decision Making, Relationships with Local Hosts & Japanese Culture, Risk Factors v. Protective Factors, Safety). The collective narratives highlighted the need for more male representation in family programming and additional efforts to mobilize male spouses on military bases. Research participants identified employment and support barriers specific to CFAY Yokosuka. Furthermore, participants shared direct perspectives on how they have perceived their experiences as different than those of female spouses.

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The Cross-Cultural Adjustment of Male Military Spouses Relocating Overseas

Ciji L. Blue, LCSW, LISW-CP

A Dissertation In Social Work

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Social Work

2021

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The Cross-Cultural Adjustment of Male Military Spouses Relocating Overseas

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the male military spouses whose stories contributed to this research. Additionally, I dedicate this study to all military spouses residing overseas and the sacrifices made to support our service members. I hope my work makes it easier for other male military spouses to share their perspectives and make their presence known.
Acknowledgements

I am grateful for my husband, Ceasar Belton IV, whose incessant support has made this dissertation possible. Your diligence and patience, throughout this process, has kept me focused and grounded.

I would like to acknowledge my Dissertation Committee (Dr. Marcia Martin, Dr. Shakira Espada-Campos, Dr. Amy Page). Your feedback and instruction has encouraged me to think critically about research and to strive for excellence in academia. I want to acknowledge the CFAY (Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka) community and the spouses who were instrumental in helping me with this research. To all my DSW classmates, thank you for the support over the years and for keeping me encouraged during this time.
Abstract
The Cross-Cultural Adjustment of Male Military Spouses Relocating Overseas
Ciji L. Blue-Belton, LCSW, LISW-CP

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A 2019 demographics report by the Department of Defense recorded male military spouses as 9.1% (54,831) of the overall active-duty military spouse population, while female military spouses represented 90.9% (550,885) (DOD, 2019). Of the abundant military community family programs, most are designed for and utilized by female spouses. In research concerning international military communities, male spouses are often excluded, or responses are too few to be statistically significant to guide program development or theoretical suppositions (Southwell et al., 2016). Subsequently, male military spouses are an understudied and often overlooked subpopulation. Additionally, male spouses have the added burden of underrepresentation, isolation from other male spouses, and stigma related to the gender norms of being a male spouse in a predominately female environment. With one-third of military service members and families experiencing a PCS (Permanent Change of Station) move each year, the obligatory process may involve transitioning to a foreign installation during which an initial stage of cross-cultural adjustment is necessary for the functioning of the service member and expatriate military spouse (Blakely et al., 2012). “Relocation Stress” is identified as one of the top five stressors of military life (Tong et al., 2018). Though mutually beneficial for both the service member and spouse, an OCONUS (Outside the Continental US) relocation can have adverse psychosocial outcomes for the expatriate male military spouse.

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Introduction

In 2014, I began working OCONUS (Outside the Continental United States) as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker supporting military service members and their families in South Korea (Camp Casey, Camp Red Cloud, Camp Humphreys), Germany (USAG Bavaria, USAG Stuttgart, USAG Rheinland-Pfalz), Bahrain (NSA Bahrain), Japan (Misawa Air Base, CFAY Yokosuka), and CONUS (Continental United States) in Alaska (Ft. Wainwright). As families shared their stories and background, the complexities of their adjustment were compounded by the addition of children, underemployment opportunities, lack of community for special groups (e.g., same-sex couples, male spouses, minority groups), loosely tethered resources, and cross-cultural challenges. I met spouses who were compelled to return home periodically to be among extended family and social supports during their service member’s deployment; and spouses whose marital problems were exacerbated by deployment. Additionally, I recognized subgroups whose needs were deeply buried under the projected heteronormative, traditional expectations of family structures. While many of the available resources for families were sought and utilized to a great extent by female spouses, the space for male spouses seemed bleak. Another observation in this community of military spouses was their resilience and willingness to support one another. This dissertation is dedicated to exploring the sacrifices of military spouses, specifically male spouses, and making their stories known.
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Paper One: The Significance, Consequence, and Implications of Foreign Accompaniment for Military Spouses

I. Problem Statement

From the initial placement of military spouses overseas in 1946 (Germany and Japan), the accompanying of family satisfies reciprocal needs for both the U.S. Armed Forces and service members. The presence of military families on foreign posts embodies the Armed Forces’ belief in family preservation, legitimizes longer deployments to enhance national security, and maintains a sense of civility and diplomacy between the host country and military (Alvah, 2000). Bowen (1986) found that accompanying spousal support influences career retention, develops personal & family well-being, enhances job satisfaction, and improves productivity for military service members. Salient components of military culture, such as frequent separations, obligatory household relocations, detachment from the mainstream of nonmilitary life, family adaptation, and the social effects of rank, are influential determinants on the quality of military life (Ridenour, 1984). Though mutually beneficial for the U.S. Armed Forces and military families, the psychosocial stressors of military life, specifically relocation, can be challenging for the expatriate military spouse and the service member.

The term “expatriate spouse,” or trailing spouse, refers to spouses or committed partners of an expatriate employee relocating for career purposes (Blakely et al., 2014). The identifier of an expatriate spouse is the relocation from their native country or country of residence to a country whose culture is novel to the one in which the spouse was initially socialized (Shaffer and Hairston, 2001). Military spouses and families that are added to their service member’s orders for accompaniment during PCS moves are often identified as an accompanying spouse, dependent, or command-sponsored spouse, depending on the branch of the military. Military spouses must be legally married to a service member in order to be included in military orders. For this study, I will refer to military spouses who accompany their service members on an OCONUS (Outside the Continental US) installation as an “expatriate military spouse.”
The obligatory PCS move may involve transitioning to a foreign installation during which an initial stage of cross-cultural adjustment is necessary for the functioning of the service member and expatriate military spouse (Blakely et al., 2012). Foreign PCS (Permanent Change of Station) relocations can have deleterious psychosocial outcomes for military spouses. “Relocation Stress” is identified as one of the top five stressors of military life by 45% of military spouses and 44% of service members (Tong et al., 2018). Approximately one-third of military service members experience a PCS move each year. The PCS moving cycle can generate disruptions in spousal functioning, with chronic, psychological effects occurring after the relocation is completed (Tong et al., 2018). These disruptions are categorized into first and second-order disruptions. First-order disruptions are defined as disruptions or stressors that are direct consequences of the PCS move, e.g., moving household goods, renting/selling a current home, finding new housing, travel logistics, changing schools, etc. The stressors from first-order disruptions typically last from the moment new PCS orders are received until the relocation. Second-order disruptions are stressors that occur as a byproduct, or consequence, of the relocation, e.g., mental health issues, substance use, social integration difficulties, lack of peer support, unemployment, and other behavioral health problems.

Relocating and residing on a foreign installation can exacerbate these stressors and create poor psychosocial outcomes for military spouses (Tong et al., 2018).

Common psychological stressors of expatriate military spouses include the inability to achieve meaningful employment, loss of personal autonomy, financial strain from single incomes, loss of support systems, language barriers, and, subsequently, significant adjustment difficulties (Blakely et al., 2012). An inherent component of foreign installations is the frequent ancillary deployments of service members for field training exercises, peacekeeping, and combat missions; these unpredictable duty hours for the expatriate servicemember can cause recurrent separations lasting from weeks to months (Elliot, 2020). This presents additional psychological stress on military spouses as the disproportionate responsibilities are placed on them, especially regarding childcare. The frequent separations can negatively affect perceived spousal support, job flexibility, and marital satisfaction (Burrell et al., 2006). In addition, while programs
like “military spousal preference” aim to increase employment for military spouses, opportunities for employment are still a challenge on foreign installations. With the installation being the central hub of employment, the underemployment of spouses is far more prevalent internationally (Burke & Miller, 2018). Spouses are likelier to become “secondary-wage earners,” accepting service-related and clerical jobs unrelated to their field. The average earning loss for the family each year of foreign deployment is 14%, with over half of military spouses not working during the first year of PCS (Permanent Change of Station) relocation (Burke & Miller, 2018). These collective stressors paired with the exogenous needs of the military, irrespective of particular family dynamics, can negatively impact spousal health and well-being.

Psychologically healthier spouses are more likely to support their serving partner and family (Elliot, 2020). However, military spouses who are psychologically distressed and dissatisfied with their career outcomes may influence service retention efforts. Spousal employment and family needs are dominating factors influencing service members’ intention to leave the military (Goodier et al., 2020). The programmatic developments for spousal underemployment, education, mental health needs, and peer-led onboarding groups have all assisted in briefly mitigating common psychological stressors for family adjustment. However, despite the multitudes of programs and provisions developed for the assuagement of military service on families, there are service gaps in treating the ongoing psychological adjustment of spouses on foreign installations (Blue Star Families, 2018).

The aforementioned psychological stressors do not apply to all expatriate military spouses as the largest determinants of successful adjustment depend on the spouse’s attitude, servicemember’s rank/pay, and the specific foreign location. The existing quality of marriage, a positive outlook, ability to initiate social connections, and willingness to interact with the host country have positive correlations on adjustment to foreign installations (Blakely, Hennessy, Chung, & Skirton, 2014). Expatriate military spouses at higher risk for poor adaptation and exacerbated psychological stressors are spouses of lower ranking/ lower paid servicemembers, are on their first foreign deployment, are foreign-born, and/or are not accustomed to military culture (Padden, Connors, & Agazio, 2011). Because military families relocate on
average every 2-3 years, the psychosocial stressors will continue to exist among certain military spouses. Once spouses are on foreign installations, their existing supports are substantially reduced. The effects can be debilitating on family functioning and military service, which is counterproductive to the purpose of family accompaniment.

II. Early Origins of Foreign Accompaniment for Military Spouses

Donna Alvah’s seminal work on the history of foreign accompaniment has been extensively chronicled in the book *Unofficial Ambassadors: American Military Families Overseas and the Cold War: 1946-1965.*

While the world lauded the conclusion of World War II in Europe and the Pacific (May and August 1945, respectively), the military focused its efforts on occupying international territories and increasing post-war responsibilities (Alvah, 2007). The countless wives, fiancées, families, and significant others celebrated as they anticipated the homecoming of their service member (Carter and Diggins, 1981; Rich, 1996). With average deployment lengths of 16 months overseas, families were forced to strategically cope with their loved ones’ absences (Wattenberg, 1976). Though impractical, a small number of military spouses attempted to follow their service members during CONUS (Continental US) deployments; but trailing along international deployments proved impossible. Some families of deployed military members cohabitated with other military families, while others resorted to moving in with relatives (Blum, 1976; Gentile, 1943, Tuttle, 1995; Weatherford, 1990). Families classified as “dependents” of service members did receive monetary allowances from the government; however, the allowances were not enough to support an entire household and were inadequate for spouses living in parts of the country where the cost of living was high (Krick, 1943; Tuttle, 1995). By 1942, the Army’s allowances were, reportedly, $50 a month for the spouse and $20 per month for each dependent child (Albano, 1994). The culmination of economic necessity, patriotism, and the absence of men in the workforce, prompted women to join the
labor force in defense industries. In 1944, approximately 2.7 million women worked in defense industries, of which 3 out of 4 were mothers whose children were under the age of 14 (Tuttle, 1945).

Families who willingly endured separation for the sake of patriotism and duty grew less tolerant after World War II. The war had ended, drafting did not. Women experienced widespread job loss as service members returned, and officials openly expressed negative sentiments of women continuing in the workforce (May, 2008; Gluck, 1987). J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the FBI, warned that neglected children of working mothers were in danger of “stumbling into the dreaded maze of delinquency and disease, of reformatory and prison, or, if they are not apprehended, of maiming and plundering (Tuttle, 1993 p. 70).” The slow, moderate return of service members exacerbated families’ concerns of overseas deployment lengths. Early advocacy groups wrote the Office of Dependency Benefits, citing the return of their service member as more favorable than the paltry spousal allowances (“Dependency Office Gets Pleas,” 1945). In Toledo, Ohio, 300 women formed a club, “Bring Back my Daddy,” advocating for family reunification and an increase in their spousal allowances. The group expanded to include a Wisconsin chapter, whose members sent baby shoes & booties with notes attached that read, “Please bring my daddy home,” to the Senate Military Community (Gravois, 1986; “Idle, Single Men,” 1945). To this end, Dwight Eisenhower, Chief of Staff of the 3rd Army, openly supported the idea of bringing home service members to their families. In response, the Selective Service stopped the drafting of fathers and allowed service members with three children or more to apply for immediate release from their service duty (“Ike Cites Need,” 1945). Though well-meaning, this act alone did not satisfy family reunification needs, and many service members remained abroad, away from their families.

Representative Margaret Chase Smith, of Maine, suggested that placing military spouses abroad could enhance morale and restore uprightness amongst service members. She highlighted the fact that the military was using transportation to bring foreign “war brides” to the United States. Her unique perspective suggested that military transportation (ships) could be utilized to bring families abroad as well (Alvah, 2007). Other officials suggested bringing military families abroad for economic necessity, suggesting that
spouses could be utilized for volunteerism. In 1946, approximately ten women from “Servicemen’s Wives and Children’s Association,” an informal group, held an impromptu meeting with General Eisenhower as he walked to a Congressional hearing, urging the immediate release of the fathers from military service (“Wives Corner Ike,” 1946). Shortly thereafter, he wrote a letter proposing that any Officer and Enlisted Servicemember (of the first three grades), who were willing to commit to an indefinite period of service abroad, be allowed the accompaniment of their military spouses in Europe, if the service member could secure adequate accommodations. General George Marshall, U.S. Army Chief of Staff, responded that the time had not yet come for military spousal accompaniment in the European Theatre (Eisenhower et al., 1970). However, by the early summer of 1946 in Latin America, the Navy had made exceptions to spousal accompaniment for foreign attaches and those with diplomatic status; justifying its policy by utilizing military spouses to perform official duties. As consideration of foreign spousal accompaniment heightened, concerns of service member morale, discipline, fraternization, foreign relations, and integrity rose (Alvah, 2007).

The number of service members abroad shrank from twelve to three million, and by mid-1947, the total number of military service members overseas totaled around 1.5 million (Matloff, 1969; Wattenberg, 1976). Service members abroad reported unsanitary living conditions, poor food, and liberty restrictions during the occupation. The military attempted to reconcile their need for personnel abroad by implementing measures to increase the morale of service members (Alvah, 2007). Programs that offered recreation, entertainment, barbershops, and automotive care were implemented. Officials soon discovered that poor morale was linked to poor discipline and criminal behaviors (Frederiksen, 1956). In the European Theatre, violent crimes, allegedly perpetrated by American service members, caused a strained relationship with local German communities. Rampant occurrences of rape, robbery, homicide, public drunkenness, pilfering, and black-market trading (coffee, cigarettes, chocolate) occurred (Zink, 1957; US Army, 1951). Within the first six months of the German occupation, approximately 7,800 motor vehicle accidents were reportedly caused by Americans. Serious crimes tripled (assaults & homicide) between August 1945 and
January 1946 (Davis, 1967). Between May 1945 and June 1947, over 1,000 cases of sexual assault against local German women were reported (Goedde, 2002). In Okinawa, numerous reports of sexual assaults against women and children increased, causing the Commanding General to make rape punishable by death for service members in Okinawa (Fisch, 1988). A growing industry of sex workers and comfort facilities aimed at servicemembers also contributed to numerous children remaining fatherless and abandoned as soldiers returned to the United States (Dower, 1999). In 1953, Germany reported nearly 94,000 orphaned children from the occupation of American soldiers. Biracial children were reportedly ostracized and abandoned by their local German families (Davis, 1967; Goedde, 2002; Zink, 1957).

The need to improve foreign relationships within the European Theatre and Japan, along with increasing morale and personnel retention led to the final considerations of military spousal accompaniment. The military used family accompaniment to mitigate criminal behaviors, extinguish complaints of family disruption, and reduce fraternization (Davis, 1967; Frederiksen, 1953). In the initial logistical planning, fuel shortages and accommodations stalled the process (Alvah, 2000). However, by April 1946, service members were allowed to submit applications for their families to join them. The priority was placed on service members’ willingness to commit to an additional year overseas and families remaining overseas until service orders placed them elsewhere (US Army Forces, 1946; Davis, 1967). This transition is now referenced as a Permanent Change of Station (PCS). Families were financially responsible for securing passports and making arrangements for packing and shipping household goods. Once they received notification, families were additionally responsible for their transportation to the embarkation locations, New York and New Orleans for journeys across the Atlantic, and Seattle and San Francisco for the Pacific. Nearly all families traveled to their respective locations by ship; accounts of the ships’ conditions varied among spouses (Alvah, 2007). On April 16th, 1947, the first families to arrive in Europe docked in Bremerhaven, Germany. On June 21st, 22 Naval and Marine families arrived in Japan on the USS Carroll (Davis, 1967). Plans of future military housing communities would consist of living quarters, schools, churches, and service facilities. (Alvah, 2007).
The earlier roles of military spouses abroad aligned with the aims of global humanitarianism, which focused on strengthening alliances within the host countries. Military spouses were expected to represent American values as they immersed themselves in the local community. Activities that were encouraged included aiding the military community through volunteerism, assisting other newly arrived spouses, and performing charity work in the local communities. During this time, ALL military spouses abroad were females, and the majority were White, attributable primarily to the racial composition of the Armed Forces during this time. The 1960s census reported that 90.1% of the Armed Forces were White, while 9.9% were considered Non-White. Additionally, of the 452,504 spouses who moved abroad, 90.0% were classified as White, 6.1% Black, and 3% Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, and Other (Alvah, 2007). Approximately 99.1% of military personnel abroad were males (605,140), with less than 1% being females (5,034) (US Bureau of the Census, 1964). Though nearly 350,000 women served in World War II, bans on female service members marrying and having children remained in effect (Alvah, 2007). In addition, bans on gay and lesbian service members were punishable by dishonorable discharge. Consequently, the concept of a male spouse abroad, or male spouses, was nonexistent and prohibited for female service members and male same-sex couples.

In 1951, President Harry Truman signed an executive order making it permissible for the Armed Forces to terminate female service members who were married, pregnant, or those with dependent child(ren) under 18. This policy was not reversed until 1975 (Alvah, 2007). In part, this was due to the discourse around gender discrimination in the military, the incessant demands of equal benefits for female service members, and the landmark case of Lt. Sharon Fronteiro. In this case, Lt. Fronteiro’s husband was denied military entitlement benefits of housing and military medical access, the same benefits afforded to spouses of male service members (Albano, 1994). Female service members were required to prove financial dependency status of their spouses and children; male service members were not. Female service members had to show proof that their spouses and children were dependent for over half of their support to qualify for benefits. This case resulted in a Supreme Court ruling it unconstitutional and discriminatory to
require female service members to prove family dependency, arguing that they should receive automatic presumption of family dependency as male personnel did (Albano, 1994).

Future landmark policies would forever change the military culture and widen the concept of military spouses and families. The repealing of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell (DADT),” in 2001 continues to be heralded as a celebratory hallmark for LGBTQIA servicemembers. This policy was implemented in 1994 and prevented LGBTQIA servicemembers from disclosing their sexual orientation. The absence of concealing sexual orientation has encouraged acceptance and is symbolic of the Department of Defenses’ recognition that excluding servicemembers on the sole basis of sexuality is meritless. The legalization of gay marriage in 2015 would allow same-sex marriage in the military without the threat of discharge, and same-sex military spouses to receive the customary benefits and allowances given to spouses in heterosexual marriages (e.g., health insurance, housing, VA benefits). Though the military has progressed in efforts toward inclusion, the needs of certain populations (i.e., male military spouses) are under-researched and absent in military programming.

III. The Armed Forces & Foreign Accompaniment Today

Today’s voluntary military has grown exponentially with the draft's conclusion in 1973. According to a 2019 Demographics report, the combined number of the Active Duty and Reservist population is 2,405,228 of which, 1,326,000 are considered Active Duty. The demographic composition of the Armed Forces has remained consistent, with a greater proportion of Enlisted service members (82.8%) than Officers (17.2%) (DOD, 2019). Similarly, the racial structure of the Armed Forces population is still largely White (70.8%), with African Americans (16.8%) and Hispanic or Latino members (14.9%) reporting as the larger minority populations (DOD, 2019). As a constant, the number of male service members (82.8%) far exceed that of female service members (17.2%). In 2019, male service members totaled 1,737,454, and female service members totaled 390,071 (DOD, 2019). In 2021, the DOD’s Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion reported 229,994 female service members serving primarily in the Army (74,104), Air Force (69,927), and Navy (69,688). (DOD, 2021). The total DOD force remains young
as 40.9% (870,788) of Active-Duty members are 25 yrs. old or younger; 26-30 yrs. old (20.3%), 31-35 yrs. old (15.2%), and 36-40 yrs. old (11.6%). Only 48% of Active-Duty members are married (1,020,572), while 46.5% have never married. (DOD, 2019).

Though the demographic composition of the Armed Forces has remained constant, military spouses and families are largely diverse and cannot be neatly pigeonholed. First, over 60% of Active-Duty family members are children, while almost forty percent (36.8%) are spouses. Of the entire Active-Duty force, family members (1,591,042) continue to outnumber service members (1,326,000), a recurring trend since the 1960s (DOD, 2019). More specifically, the ratio of military families to service members is 1.2 to 1. Contrary to the DOD, Active-Duty spouse ages are more evenly distributed: 18.8% are 25 yrs. or younger (181,305), 22.6% are 26 to 30 yrs. old (218,330), 22.2% are ages 31 to 35 (132,202), and 17% are between the ages of 36 to 40 (164,175) (DOD, 2019). Historically, family structures were traditionally nuclear with a service member and a domestic civilian spouse; however, military family structures now have expanded to include nuclear, blended, single, multi-generational, same-sex, and dual service military families (Clever & Segal, 2013). The number of Active-Duty families married with children is 399,601 (30%); however, the number of Active-Duty families without children has grown to 182,539 (13.8%). Most Active-Duty service members are single and without children, 45.4% (601,717). Active-Duty single parents account for 4% (52,674), and dual military families with children make up 2.4% (32,478). Dual military families without children account for 4.2% (54,860) of overall Active-Duty families (DOD, 2019).

Military families relocate, on average, every three years to locations worldwide, two times more than civilian families. A PCS (Permanent Change of Station) move, whether overseas (OCONUS) or domestic (CONUS), receives travel and relocation entitlements, such as moving assistance with HHG (House-Hold Goods) shipping and transporting. Families can ship a privately owned vehicle and receive travel assistance with shipping pets. For military children, DODEA (Dept. of Defense Education Activities) schools are available in remote and OCONUS installations, including 194 schools worldwide (Clever & Segal, 2013). Like deployment trends in the 1940s, active-duty service members still occupy countries in the European and Pacific regions. As of December 31st, 2020, the Defense Manpower Data Center
(DMDC) reported the largest presence of military members overseas in Japan (56,474), Germany (34,475), South Korea (25,430), and Italy (12,263) (DMDC, 2021).

Ongoing studies recognize family satisfaction as the most significant influence on personnel retention and, in response, have developed a myriad of social service policies and programs. The need to recruit, retain quality military personnel, and recognize the distinguishing trends of family self-sufficiency has spurred the innovation of comprehensive, complex systems of federal benefits for all branches. Programs have evolved from informal, in-kind assistance to universal supports and hybrid benefit systems. Military families receive benefits, such as government housing, housing allowances, cost of living allowances, medical/dental care, and subsidized child-care, Department of Defense schools, survivor benefits, deployment cycle support, counseling, exchange and commissary access, military spousal preference for jobs, financial management services, career development assistance, education assistance, and transition assistance programs, etc. (Clever & Segal, 2013).

IV. Male Spouses Overseas

An overlooked subpopulation within the military spouse community is male spouses. In research concerning military communities, male spouses are often excluded, or responses are too few to be statistically significant (Southwell et al., 2016). Of the abundant military family programs, most are designed for female spouses. Additionally, male spouses have the added burden of underrepresentation, isolation from other male spouses, and stigma related to the gender norms of being a male spouse (Southwell et al., 2016). Gender assumptions play a significant role in the experiences of male spouses. Military OneSource describes the unique challenges faced by the male spouse population. One example includes how their identity can possibly clash with their role in the marriage. This is particularly true in role reversals where males are unemployed and act as primary caregivers for children and the home (Military One Source, 2015).

Literature on male military spouses is sparse, and more empirically based research that informs military programs about this underserved population is urgently needed. The small representation of male
military spouse feedback and availability has largely restricted theoretical propositions, exploratory investigations, and program development within military communities. The special circumstances of male spouses suggest the need for substantial support in adjusting to the life of an expatriate military spouse in a predominately female spouse community. We have learned from previous studies that the adjustment of a military spouse is crucial to service member’s retention and has crossover and spillover effects for service members’ performance (Alvah, 2000; Blakely et al., 2014). Additionally, for male spouses in heterosexual marriages, we learned their worries extended beyond deployment to include worries of their wives being sexually harassed and assaulted during the workday (Southwell et al., 2016). We also know the nontraditional roles of civilian spouses pose challenges both within their marital relationships and the military community itself (Southwell et al., 2016). To parallel the experiences of male expatriate military spouses, literature on the non-military expatriate spouse will be included to understand cross-cultural adjustment difficulties.

Southwell’s (2016) qualitative study of 20 civilian husbands uncovered unique characteristics of male spouses in female service member-led families. Female service member households often include nonbiological children and spouses who were prior military (Southwell et al., 2016). The probability of divorce in these families increased by 1.4% for every month of deployment separation, which is significantly higher than the .3% for male service member-led families. Additionally, this study found that female services members’ marital dissolution percent was double those of active-duty men, 6.60% (female service members) vs. 2.60% (male service members). Even in the absence of deployment-related issues, nondeployed female service members’ risk for divorce was double that of nondeployed male service members (Karney & Crown, 2007). In this study, civilian husbands reported feelings of isolation from other civilian husbands and exclusion from military support services. Participants further described military activities and support resources as not being designed for male spouses’ needs and identified stigma attached to their utilization of supportive programs (Southwell et al., 2016). Subsequently, Southwell (2016) found that civilian husbands were less likely to support their spouse’s efforts of remaining in the
military. Regarding employment, participants described needing more weeks to find employment than wives following a PCS move. Civilian husbands cited tuition assistance, reduced financial stress, and reduced financial burden as perceived benefits of being a military spouse. Other benefits mentioned were from fathers whose primary roles included childcare and caring for the home. They reported that caring for their children during their wives’ deployments helped build stronger father-child relationships.

The most extensive field study of expatriate male spouses was conducted on 45 expatriate non-military male spouses in eight host countries within the Asia Pacific region. This study explored the challenges of adjusting to “female bread-winner” households (Cole, 2012). Of the sample, 85% of participants faced career challenges while accompanying their partners internationally, yet only 21% received employment assistance from their partner’s employers (Cole, 2012). Using both qualitative & quantitative methods (semi-structured interviews and surveys), the study found that almost two-thirds of participants described themselves as career-oriented and one-third as income-oriented. Income-oriented spouses are more compelled to prioritize employment opportunities by income potential without much regard for the industry. In contrast, a career-oriented spouse often has specialized knowledge of a particular industry and is more inflexible in seeking or accepting opportunities outside of their professions (Hosek et al., 2002). Study results indicated that the 33 male participants were comfortable in “female bread-winner” households and not overly concerned with their status as being financially dependent on their working spouse (Cole, 2012). However, participants felt ostracized by others in their community and lacked social support from other males spouses. Participants described heightened isolation due to their small numbers, and some experienced depression from the severity of the isolation and its impact on their health.

For male spouses in dual-career situations, adjusting to being a non-working spouse may prove difficult. Some male spouses may feel less worthy if unable to contribute financially and may feel compelled, by societal pressures, to work (Punnet et al., 1992). Maintaining dual careers while abroad can be problematic; even if jobs are available, they may not fit with the male spouses’ work preferences (Selmer & Leung, 2003). Jobs that are misaligned with capabilities may result in frustration, and, worse,
career sacrifices may cause male spouses to trail behind their peers. Silberstein (1992) suggested that male spouses may raise more suspicions, compared to female spouses, from employers concerning career gaps. Working during a relocation can relieve ambiguity and insecurity with identity formation; conversely, unemployment may result in anxiety and create stress within the marriage (Selmer & Leung, 2003).

We know that during expatriation or PCS moves, male spouses may go through developmental stages while attempting to maintain balance. On international assignments, internal and external conditions will exert pressure on the male spouse’s ability to maintain that balance. Ideally, as the male spouse utilizes resources and develops appropriate coping mechanisms, they can positively influence their adjustment (Brown, 2008). However, the gaps in research do not clarify what internal and external conditions will be appraised as stressful for the male spouse. Additionally, current research does not identify effective coping strategies used by this particular population, or evaluate current military programs aimed at increasing coping strategies for male spouses.

V. Theoretical Perspectives of Adjustment: Stress and Coping Theory

Understanding how spouses achieve successful adaptation and remain resilient during challenges and significant risk exposures, such as an international relocation, is paramount. For these reasons, Stress & Coping Theory is used to lend perspective in examining how military spouses resolve and cope with stress. Spousal Adjustment during international relocations was once considered a solitary construct, primarily relegated to individuals' adaptive responses to their environment. Early theoreticians considered that the alleviation of cross-cultural stress would occur with time, familiarity, and confidence (Oberg, 1960). Contemporary theoretical frameworks of adjustment have emphasized the need to consider separately both the psychological (well-being and satisfaction) and socio-cultural competence (ability to fit in) as expansive components of adjustment (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Kennedy, 1993). Other frameworks, focusing on dual-career couples, highlight that role changes occurring during an international relocation create the need for spouses to have “meaningful, portable identities” (McNulty, 2012, p. 417). The progression of research
has made it evident that, from the perspective of relocations associated with PCSing, spousal adjustment is multifaceted and linked to service member retention (Alvah, 2000; Blakely et al., 2014) and has crossover and spillover effects between family members (Collins & Bertone, 2017). We know PCS (Permanent Change of Station) relocations are disruptive to family functioning, often forcing spouses to contend with loss of social supports, employment, adjustment, and the task of recreating a new sense of normalcy (Blakely et al., 2012; Brown, 2008). However, PCSing to a foreign installation compounds these current stressors due to concurrent demands of relearning cultural norms, managing environmental expectations, adapting to cultural nuances, and navigating language barriers (Cole, 2011).

Previous theoretical explanations of stress have conceptualized stress as either an external stimulus, a response, the product of an individual/environmental interaction, or a transaction between an individual and their environment (Brough et al., 2009; Cox & Griffiths, 2010). Lazarus & Folkman’s Stress and Coping Theory posits that it is neither the individual nor the environment that produces stress but the cognitive appraisal or meanings that individuals attribute to the stressor and the resultant coping processes (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Initially developed by Lazarus, later updates to the theory by Susan Folkman integrate and consider both the positive and negative emotions that occur during the stress process (Biggs et al., 2017). Stress and Coping Theory proposes that individuals are constantly appraising stimuli within their environment; the appraisals, subsequently, produces an array of emotions, such as stress. Stress occurs when an individual’s resources are challenged by the environment in a way that overtaxes their coping ability and endangers their well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Stress is defined as “exposure to stimuli appraised as harmful, threatening or challenging, and that exceeds the individual’s capacity to cope.” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 11) Appraising environmental stimuli is operationalized as “imputing relational meaning to our ongoing and changing relationships with others and the physical environment, and it is this meaning that shapes and defines our emotions” (Lazarus, 2005, p. 10). Lazarus (1987) proposes that emotions cannot be understood independently or from the perspective of either person or environment; the aggregate interplay of both person and environment produces a level of complex analyses.
For example, the concept of “maladjustment” is meaningless when describing an environment without regard to the individual transacting within the environment; the same is true when defining maladjustment from the individual’s perspective without environmental nuances to provide context.

The central assumption of Stress and Coping Theory places significance on the perceptions of the transaction being stressful, rather than the transaction itself, that determines if coping mechanisms are implemented or if the stressor can be resolved (Lazarus, 1991). The appraisals from the transactions between the individual and environment integrate two processes: 1. the individual’s personal agenda, which includes their beliefs, values, attitudes, and goals, and 2. the environmental factors, such as demands and resources (Lazarus, 1991). The difference in an individual’s personal agenda and the complexities of the environment moderate the variation in appraisals that different people make within the same environment. For the stressors appraised as harmful (already experienced), challenging (potential for mastery or gain/), or threatening (harm that is anticipated), a coping strategy is initiated to mitigate the stressor or to manage the accompanying emotions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). The two types of appraisals are primary appraisals and secondary appraisals. Primary appraisals describe the motivational relevance of what is occurring or the meaning ascribed to the specific individual/environmental transaction and the relevance of that transaction to the individual’s wellbeing (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987; Folkman, 1984). For example, a military spouse relocating overseas may immediately be concerned or stressed about employment prospects and ascribe the primary appraisal, or meaning, of a potential employment disruption to the relocation. An individual may perceive this relocation as “harmful (already experienced)” due to a previous negative experience with securing employment during an international relocation. Primary Appraisal transactions can be described as benign-positive (having a positive effect), irrelevant (inconsequential to one’s wellbeing), or stressful (an event that could signify harm/loss, threat, or challenge) (Oliver & Brough, 2002). Lazarus explains that a person’s perception of a human relationship or environment posing a risk, for harm/threat or as beneficial, is shaped by the psychological characteristics that the individual brings to the experience and the social/cultural conditions of the environment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). Whereas
threat/harm appraisals evoke negative emotions, challenge appraisals entail potential opportunities for growth and rewards when sufficient resources are present (Hobfoll, 1989; Lazarus, 1991).

Secondary Appraisals occur when a transaction is deemed stressful and involves cognitive processing where the individual must identify and evaluate their coping resources, situational variables, and coping style (Dewe & Cooper, 2007; Folkman, 1984). The interaction between these factors determines the coping actions enacted to “shape, manage, or resolve the event.” (Dewe & Cooper, 2007, p. 144) Secondary appraisals are essential to primary appraisals as they involve evaluative judgments about potential actions to reduce the stress, the amount of control we believe we can exert, and identifying which coping strategies may work (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). If one is confident that potential damage can be controlled, threat/harm may be minimal. Using the above example, an individual appraising an international relocation as disruptive to their career (primary appraisal) may consider and evaluate all available resources (secondary appraisal) to prepare and reduce career disruption.

If a situation is considered stressful (primary appraisal) and requires efforts to mitigate or resolve the event (secondary appraisal), a coping strategy is enacted (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). Coping involves “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of a person.” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 141) In previous models, including the animal model and ego psychology, coping was viewed as a behavioral response to avert stressful environmental conditions. These behavioral responses primarily included avoidance and escape (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). Ego psychology emphasizes the cognition involved in making adaptational choices along with the efforts made to manage the impulses and the environment. In contrast, Stress & Coping Theory views coping as a dynamic process that varies as much as the individual enacting the coping strategies.

Stress & Coping Theory postulates that coping has two functions: 1. to manage the stressor (Problem-Focused Coping) and 2. to manage the emotions occurring from the stressor (Emotion-Focused Coping).
Coping) (Biggs et al., 2017). Studies have regarded Problem-Focused Coping as more adaptive and effective than Emotion-Focused Coping (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; O’Driscoll, Brough, & Kalliath, 2009; Taylor & Stanton, 2007). In a study on cardiac patients, Problem-Focused Coping was linked to psychological well-being, quality of life, and enhanced self-care (Graven et al., 2014). Another study found Emotion-Focused Coping to be associated with anxiety, exhaustion, and dissatisfaction (Boyd et al., 2009).

A study of 282 expats repatriating from Japan measured coping mechanisms in three domains: repatriation, interactions, and work adjustment (Herman & Tetrick, 2009). In this sample, 282 repatriates (68% American, 14% Canadian, 14% Australian) had spent an average of two years in Japan and were returning home. Repatriation stressors differ significantly from expatriate stressors and require coping mechanisms different from those used during their adjustment period. Repatriation stressors include “disconfirmed expectations of familiarity, the resistance of home country nationals accepting new perspectives, and conflicting cultural identities” (Herman & Tetrick, 2009, p. 74). Coping was measured using a 30-Item tool developed by Stahl and Caliguiri (2005) and yielded results showing Problem-Focused Coping having more positive outcomes than Emotion-Focused Coping.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) assert that neither Problem-Focused Coping nor Emotion-Focused Coping is inherently better than the other, but the effectiveness depends on the context and fit of the environment. The effectiveness of the coping strategy depends on how well it corresponds with the appraisal and situational conditions of the environment. Edwards and Cooper (1990) present three basic approaches of fit between the person and environment’s potential for stress: “1. The discrepancy between the Person and Environment (strain increases as the characteristics of the environment deviate from the characteristics of the person), 2. The interaction between the Person and Environment (strain occurs when environmental characteristics are combined with certain person characteristics), 3. The proportion of the Person that is fulfilled by the Environment (strain increases as this proportion becomes lower).” (p. 297) Moos and Swindle (1990) contribute four main environmental conditions that can be measured.
independently of an individual’s appraisal: “Physical features, structural & policy factors, aggregate characteristics of the people in a setting, and social climate.” (p. 30)

Feldman and Thomas (1992) studied managers from the United States on international assignments in Saudi Arabia, Japan, and South America. The study examined the impact of five individual-level career management strategies, ranging from Problem-Focused Coping to Emotion-Focus Coping, on the success of their career transitions. Using surveys, the career self-management coping behaviors that were examined included: 1. “Active Attempts to Get Help, 2. Active Attempts to become socially integrated into the new work environment and culture, 3. Psychological Reappraisal (seeking more positive experiences and looking for the advantages of the job), 4. Psychological Withdrawal (focusing on the temporariness of the job and insulating oneself from the culture), and 5. Palliative Coping (eating, drinking, smoking, sleeping excessively)” (Feldman & Thomas, 1992, p. 276). The study found that social integration and psychological reappraisal were positively correlated with psychological and physiological stress symptoms. In particular, psychological reappraisal positively correlates with skill acquisition, job satisfaction, and internal work motivation (Feldman & Thomas, 1992). Emotion-Focused Coping strategies, such as withdrawal and palliative coping, were negatively associated with personal effectiveness and influenced expatriate managers’ willingness to stay in the country and job satisfaction.

An exception worth noting, though expatriates cited social integration and psychological reappraisal as integral to helping them adjust, these Problem-Focused Coping strategies were ineffective for expatriate managers in Saudi Arabia. The environmental stressors of the country’s religious restrictions on travel, clothing, job opportunities for women, open practice of Christianity, and freedom of speech insulated these expatriate managers and their families, limiting their ability or want to integrate socially. A buffer that reduced the effects of further social isolation was their living in compounds that did not impose the same country and religious restrictions (Feldman & Thomas, 1992). The results of this study highlight the influence of the environment on coping strategies available; additionally, it emphasized that Emotion-Focused Coping strategies may be more effective when an individual is limited within their environment.
Biggs et al. (2017) describe Emotion-Focused Coping as most effective for short-term adaptation when appraisals develop intense emotional strain, when the situation is appraised as uncontrollable or unavoidable, and when current resources are insufficient to support Problem-Focused Coping strategies. Ben-Zur (2009) suggests that a persistent dependence and adherence to Emotion-Focused Coping is not helpful as it may encourage disconnection from the problem and impede future attempts at coping.

Criticisms of Stress and Coping theory state that an in-depth explanation of both Problem-Focused Coping and Emotion-Focused Coping does not exist and are ambiguous constructs for measurement and assessment (Biggs et al., 2017). Latack and Havlovic (1992) describe both Emotion-Focused and Problem-Focused Coping as “insufficiently specific to capture the various sub-dimensions that have emerged in coping research.” (p. 492) Skinner et al. (2003) describe both coping strategies as not mutually exclusive and exhaustive and suggests that coping taxonomies should be conceptually clear, mutually exclusive, and exhaustive. Conceptually clear coping taxonomies are described as belonging to a higher-order category of coping (e.g., making a plan, considering alternatives, seeking solutions) and could be considered as “approach” coping. Mutually exclusive coping taxonomies are defined as coping reactions that can be described and assigned to one category (Skinner et al., 2003). This points to the overlap between both Problem-Focused and Emotion-Focused Coping. Exhaustive coping taxonomies are those in which the core coping mechanisms are included and provided with full descriptions, which is not the case for Problem-Focused and Emotion-Focused Coping (Skinner et al., 2003).

Another critique of Stress & Coping Theory was its exclusion of the simultaneous positive, emotional experiences during the stress process. To this end, Folkman (1997) revised and supplemented the theory to develop two key areas: 1. the functionality of positive emotions in the stress process and 2. the function of the coping process in increasing positive emotions during distress. Additionally, the revised Stress & Coping Theory introduced Meaning-Focused Coping to propose that unsuccessful coping and subsequent distress may create a different meaning and develop positive coping, especially when stressors are uncontrollable and overwhelmingly insensitive (Folkman, 2008). Park and Folkman (1997) describe
Meaning-Focused coping as changing the appraised meaning of a situation to align and be more consistent with an individual’s beliefs and goals. Meaning-Focusing Coping involves considering one’s values, priorities, beliefs, and goals to reorganize life’s priorities, ascribe positive appraisals to regular events, and bring awareness of a current stressor's positive aspects. Positively reinterpreting a stressor, or reframing, has been widely used in therapy before and has been effective with bereavement, caregiving, and dealing with chronic illnesses (Moskowitz et al., 1996).

Extending this theoretical framework back to international relocation, Lazarus (1980) found that emotion-focused coping may be more effective in social conditions and environments where individuals feel helpless and lack agency. For example, an expatriate military spouse who temporarily withdraws into the social comfort zone of the military installation during an initial period of adjustment and uses the cultural knowledge of other military spouses to learn about the host country’s culture is an example of the two coping functions being combined and used to overcome maladjustment. This suggests that no coping strategy is inherently superior and that diverse coping strategies, however dysfunctional, may serve as a valuable and effective adjustment function in the context of an international assignment. Lazarus states, “To study relocation requires that we focus on what Mr. and Mrs. X and Y, and their children, or whomever, expect and want, how they struggle day in and day out to manage the adaptational tasks they face in their new place of residence. Indeed, we need to know what these tasks are and their sense of how they are being received by their social and physical environment.” (Lazarus 1997, p. 40)
VI. Literature Review

The following Literature Review will present a comprehensive summary of specific components whose resolve is identified as integral, for male military spouses, in increasing adjustment on foreign installations. The three components discussed are Social Support, Adjustment, and Employment. The definitions of these concepts, their significance, and utility in military and cross-cultural studies will be explored. The synthesis of research will discuss the benefit of each component and their moderating effects on stress as well as how the absence of each component has been appraised in both military and international communities. The data will discuss the psychosocial considerations of each component and the interdependent causal relationships that sustain their effectiveness through constant feedback within the environment.

A. Social Support

This section will introduce and discuss the utility of social support through the lens of cross-cultural adjustment, coping, its attenuation of stress, and the discourse on the processes through which social support is beneficial for expatriate military spouses. Additionally, how military spouses cope and the effects of limited/inadequate social supports, during an international relocation, will be examined. The presence of social supports has been utilized within research and healthcare domains to predict better healthcare outcomes and reduce the effects of physiological & psychological stressors (Tracy & Whittaker, 1990). Having a more extensive social support network is correlated with reduced blood pressure and heart rate in the face of acute stressors (Hornstein & Eisenberger, 2017). Whitaker and Garbarino (1983) describe a social network as, “a set of relationships that provide nurturance and reinforcement for coping with life on a daily basis” (p. 490). Social support is described as the various ways in which people render assistance to one another, e.g. emotional encouragement, advice, information, guidance, tangible aid, or concrete assistance (Barrera & Ainley, 1983; Gottlieb, 1983; House & Kahn, 1985; Wood, 1984).
Social support can be provided intermittently through helping networks of family or friends; or mobilized through professional/organizational interventions (Tracy & Whittaker, 1990). A social support network can be characterized by a “mutuality, reciprocity, and informality” not readily evident in professional helping relationships (Tracy & Whitaker, 1990, p. 462). Cohen and Willis (1985) posit that people with social supports that provide psychological and material resources are often healthier than those with fewer social supports. This is attributed to the function of social support networks providing positive experiences, positive affect, a sense of predictability, stability, overall well-being, and recognition of self-worth (Cohen & Willis, 1985). Social support serves as a buffer to deployment-related stressors and enhances the personal meaning-making of stressful stimuli (Blakely et al., 2014). Prior to relocation, the provision of social support is reported to mitigate uncertainty and encourage adjustment (Cohen & Pressman, 2004).

Social Support models range in perspectives from those that laud its buffering effects on stress to models proposing its beneficial properties, irrespective of stress.Thoits (1986) refers to social support as “functions performed for a distressed individual by significant others such as family members, friends, coworkers, relatives, and neighbors” (p. 417). The functions performed can be categorized into three types of social support: Instrumental Aid, Informational Aid, Socioemotional Aid (House, 1981; Turner, 1983). Instrumental aid describes actions or materials that others provide to fulfill ordinary role responsibilities (House, 1981). Socioemotional aid refers to demonstrations or declarations of love, esteem, caring, sympathy, and group belonging (Cobb, 1975; House, 1981). Information aid is characterized by communicating facts or best practices related to a person’s current difficulties (advice, personal feedback) that mitigate those difficulties (House, 1981). Paralleling coping mechanisms, the functions of social support may work to assist an individual’s stress management efforts to change a situation, change the meaning of the situation, change their emotional reactions to the situation, or all three (Thoits, 1986).

Hornstein and Eisenberger (2017) assert that social support attenuates fear acquisition; and serves as a natural safety signal that reduces fear responses and associations formed. The perception of social support
availability stimulates a less threatening appraisal of a situation, resulting in the belief that an adequate response exists (Ross et al., 2020). When a stimulus is appraised as threatening and a subsequent appropriate coping response is unavailable, a stress reaction occurs. Social support groups may influence the extent to which a situation is appraised as threatening and/or the individual’s perception of their ability to cope (Ross et al., 2020). Ross et al. (2020) specifically notes the utility of social support as moderating military spouses’ reactions to a stressor. Higher levels of social support are associated with lower levels of depression & anxiety, and the converse is true. Higher levels of psychological distress predicts reductions in social connectedness. In longitudinal studies, lower perceived support is associated with the onset of deployment-related stress and PTSD. Additionally, lower perceived social support can predict maladaptive adjustment to cumulative military life stressors and affect psychological well-being. (Ross et al., 2020)

In a causal chain linking stress to health, the Stress Buffering Hypothesis describes how social support specifically provides protection from stressful events (Cohen & Pressman, 2004). First, support intervenes between the stressful event and reaction by attenuating or preventing a stress appraisal (Thoits, 1986). The perception and attainment of support and resources may redefine the stress and the reframing of a situation as less stressful. Secondly, the belief of social support availability may reduce or eliminate the reaction to the stressor, minimize physiological/psychological impact, and prevent maladaptive behavioral responses. The availability of people to join in shared connections and difficulties has been found to reduce the intrusive thoughts that maintain maladaptive responses to stressors. Lastly, social support may intervene by reducing the stress reaction or by directly influencing somatic processes (Cohen & Pressman, 2004). A previous study by Cohen (1992) suggests that social support buffers the impact of stress on psychological wellbeing when three conditions are met: the stressor is socially acceptable, discussion of the stressor will not disrupt the relationship, and social support is provided by people who are perceived to be credible and accurate.

In his article on Army families, Booth defines social support as “relationships that individuals have with other people and groups from which they derive help and assistance and through which they fulfill
certain social, emotional, and material needs” (Booth, et. al 2007, p. 101). Comprised of both informal/formal networks, social supports are necessary for adjustment and psychosocial well-being during military-related transitions (Tong et al., 2018). Informal social support networks can consist of spouses, extended family, friends, neighbors, and social media communities. Formal networks can include the military unit, Family Readiness Groups (FRG), recreational facilities, military hospitals/clinics, volunteer associations, and civilian community-based resources. Informal social support networks are often the first line of protection for military spouses. For expatriate spouses, informal networks are often disrupted in foreign relocations (Jervis, 2009). Although maintained electronically (i.e. email, social media, Facetime), these relationships are harder to maintain internationally due to social isolation, increased family responsibilities, sociopolitical constraints, and changes in social and/or work status (Copeland et al., 2002). Inadequate social support for accompanying spouses poses risks to the success of an international assignment or mission as spousal adjustment is linked to service member occupational performance. McNulty lists four significant ways in which expatriate spouses influence the success of the expatriate employee: “1) willingness to go, 2) assignment completion, 3) expatriate adjustment, 4) expatriate performance” (McNulty, 2012, p. 418).

An ethnographic study conducted on a military base in Southern Europe explored the impact of a foreign post on the adaptability and adjustment of 34 British military spouses (n=29 Officer spouses/n=5 Enlisted spouses) (Blakely et. al, 2014). Participants recognized forming a social network as a key initial step in establishing social supports on a foreign post. This initial step enhanced participants’ ability to settle in their new environment (Bikos et al., 2009). The use of formal sponsors during the onboarding processes in support of new arrivals was described as erratic and fluctuated often in their success of pairing families with compatible sponsors. The respondents expressed reluctance in seeking support from formal military organizations due to distrust and alleged breaches of confidence within the welfare and medical services (Blakely et al., 2014). Military involvement as a support was met with disenchantment and apprehension as spouses preferred to resolve problems individually. In parallel, social isolation was
identified as a recurring phenomenon often left unresolved. Children were perceived as either limiting or social catalysts for friendships. Spouses cited common pitfalls of engaging in unrealistic circumstances where friendships were formed hastily and quickly disrupted due to PCS relocations.

The assorted ranges of responses to potential social support sources indicated a reluctance to fully accept traditional social support networks from other military spouses because of its temporality and superficial nature (Blakely et al., 2014). When considering military spouses’ avoidance of spousal friendships/support networks, the decision is influenced by the perception that the risks may outweigh the benefits of the resource. Additionally, the service members’ desire to distance themselves from their work when off duty heavily influenced the military spouse’s preferred isolation. The disruptions of social supports were linked to spouses feeling forced to cope alone, an interrupted sense of belonging, a significant increase in emotional needs, or heightened psychosomatic and interpersonal stressors (Blakely et al., 2014). Additional findings included the mixed responses of spouses who relied heavily on domestic support structures (e.g. spouse, children) as their primary source of social support. While some spouses found more solidarity and cohesion within their family unit, others noted an inadequate social support network creates undue stress on their marriage. Pure reliance on internal family factors could lead to an isolation of experiences and sever chances of forming proactive support networks (De Verthelyi, 1995).

Similar findings were presented in a study of 639 Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) military spouses (Skomorovsky, 2014). The study examined the roles of deployment stress and social support in the psychological well-being of spouses of deployed military personnel of the CAF. Contrary to previous studies on military spouses, this study’s sample included 129 spouses who were CAF members themselves (often referred to as dual-military families in the US Armed Forces). Of the entire sample, 39% (255) of participants were military spouses of deployed service members, while 60% (384) of participants were military spouses of recently deployed service members (within the past 6 months). Deployment stress and social support were unique predictors of psychological health. More specifically, social support from family and non-military friends was statistically significant in reducing deployment stress. These social
supports were reported to enhance resilience by promoting self-efficacy (Pietrzak et al., 2010), reappraising stress more positively (Bartone, 2006), and reducing feelings of loneliness. Social support from military friends was not a significant predictor of well-being when the social support from family, friends, and partner was already accounted for (Skonorovsky, 2014). In line with research findings of the 2014 UK spouse study by Blakely et al. (2014), these participants preferred informal civilian support networks and did not readily choose military networks for social support.

Glossed over in studies of social support utility are the social conditions that preempt its effectiveness. Effective support comes from those who are perceived as socially similar and facing the same stressors and those who are managing these stressors more calmly than the distressed individual (Thoits, 1986). Sociocultural similarity increases the chances that a significant other will suggest coping mechanisms or help influence circumstances deemed acceptable by the individual. The success of programs like Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous underscore this phenomenon. Social and value-based commonalities enhance an individual’s confidence in their comparisons, and such commonalities increase the perceived applicability of others’ experiences and guidance (Thoits, 1986). Both sociocultural and situational similarities enhance the likelihood of empathic understanding, “the condition under which coping assistance should be most effective” (Thoits, 1986, p. 420). Empathic understanding serves two significant functions for the distressed individual. First, distressed people can be fearful of their responses to stress. Others’ empathic understanding provides validation that emotional responses are accurate, even if potentially inappropriate or socially unacceptable. Secondly, because others have shared meaning and feelings, despite the social undesirability of the feelings, the likelihood of rejection towards the individual is minimized.

A study of 115 U.S. Army military spouses on two Army installations in Europe (Germany and Italy) explored the relationship between social connectedness and attitudes towards the military and physical health (Crouch et al., 2016). Social connectedness is defined as “how well an individual integrates into his or her social environment and the resulting fullness of his or her social networks” (Crouch et al.
Social connectedness involves an individual's actionable steps taken to engage in, sustain, and foster relationships to increase their social support. Social connectedness can be fostered informally (social networks) or formally (organizational supports) and is attributed to improved mental health, physical health, relationship satisfaction, and career success (Crouch et al., 2016).

Within the sample cited by Crouch et al., 79 military spouses resided in Germany and 36 in Italy and were mostly female (N=112) between the ages of 30 and 39. The study measured Social Connectedness using the Social Connectedness Scale, Marital Satisfaction with the Quality of Marriage Index, Psychological Distress with the K6 Scale, and the PHQ-15 to measure Physical health symptoms (Crouch et al., 2016). The study found a link between spouses’ social connectedness, marital satisfaction, and physical health symptoms. The majority of the spouses, 78% of the sample, preferred that their service member spouse remain in the military and reported marital satisfaction. Fewer spouses, 6%, reported psychological distress, and 41% of the spouses residing in Germany reported physical health symptoms. A small number of spouses residing in Germany, 17%, reported physical health symptoms. Of the entire sample, only 7% reported psychological distress, with symptoms ranging from worthlessness and varying degrees of depression. Additional findings indicated that spouses’ social connectedness was higher among the military spouse community in Germany; however, Italy’s military spouses had built more robust social integration within the community. This can be attributed to the small size of the military installation, lack of resources, and the communal need for a depth of community resources, (e.g., healthcare). This study highlighted that some amenities offered to spouses on foreign installations may be similar but vary in the number and type of opportunities available for each base.

Like military supports, Multi-National Corporations acknowledge and implement tripartite supports (organizational, professional, social) for incoming non-military expatriate families to mitigate the difficulties of adjustment. An investigation of expatriate couples’ stressors concluded that the employed spouses’ primary stressor was limited time together, while the expatriate spouses’ primary stressor was social isolation (Brown, 2008; McNulty, 2012). In a study of 194 non-military spouses relocated
Internationally due to their partners’ jobs, spouses with higher adjustment “1) felt they had fewer losses in friendships, 2) had more functions of social supports met, and 3) received more of their social support from local, rather than long-distance informal networks” (Copeland et al., 2002, p.1). A dissertation by Jervis (2006) that focused on military wives identified two themes of loss that must be rectified for expatriate spouses to adjust: internal and external losses. Internal loss includes loss of identity, autonomy, role, while external loss includes loss of familiar environment, social supports, and employment. Jervis suggested that an expatriate spouse must supplant these losses during expatriation or suffer long-term, adverse effects on well-being (Jervis, 2006). The most vulnerable expatriate military spouses are those who rely exclusively on their service member spouse for social supports, whose social supports are distant, and those spouses of junior enlisted personnel (Booth, 2007).

Foreign relocation can reconfirm the family bond as the couple share, discuss, and empathize on the stress of their new experiences. An expatriate spouse’s perception of involvement and feedback before the relocation is critical to a sense of control, mattering, and adjustment (Copeland et al., 2002). Marital tension can exacerbate once expatriate spouses begin to feel alienated, isolated, and lonely due to less recreational time with the employed spouse. Expatriate military spouses’ feelings of alienation were found to be related to marital role tension and lack of marriage quality (Copeland et al., 2002). Foreign relocation can present challenges as the employed spouse may be the only source of social support and information during a period when work demands make it impractical to spend adequate quality time together. Black and Gregersen (1991) identified Host Country Nationals (HCNs), or locals, as necessary in-country social supports relevant to expatriate spousal adjustment. For the expatriate employee or service member, HCNs are embedded and inherent in the work setting. However, expatriate spouses have more difficulty developing a social network with HCNs. Social support from HCNs is significant because: “1. They understand the culture, 2. They can provide information on and explanations of the host culture, 3. They can provide feedback on the appropriateness of behaviors, and 4. Their type of information and cues can
collectively serve to reduce uncertainty regarding the general culture and facilitate spouse adjustment” (Black & Gregersen, 1991, p. 466).

**B. Adjustment**

International relocation can be stressful for military families and servicemembers. Much of the international relocation processes for military spouses are discussed as a part of expatriate adjustment research. Though research is limited on expatriate military spouses, there is a sizeable research base from Multi-National Human Resource development to inform the cross-cultural adjustment practices of the expatriate accompanying spouse. In many ways, the experiences of military spouses on foreign installations are similar to other expatriate spouses living abroad. Both populations share experiences of loss of identity, role, autonomy, employment, and need for social support. This section will conceptualize adjustment and highlight the unique psychosocial stressors of military spouses on foreign installations.

In its primitive form, expatriate adjustment was initially called culture shock and was defined as a process “precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse” (Oberg, 1960, p. 142). These signs and symbols serve as internal cues that we use to adapt to everyday life situations, including our social responses. Customary processes such as basic greetings, tipping servers, interpreting facial expressions, following social norms, and purchasing goods become elusory as our reliance on inherent social inclinations is removed. The course of culture shock is characterized by an initial “honeymoon phase” and has had varied discourse concerning the average length of time individuals undergo this experience. Oberg (1960) stated that this process could last from a “few days or weeks to six months depending on the circumstances” (Oberg, 1960, p. 143), while other researchers have suggested an initial two-month period after arrival. During this phase, expats are fascinated with the unfamiliar, new, and intriguing differences of the host country. As the demands of the environment increase, however, expatriates begin to deal with day-to-day life and cultural differences provoking their coping defenses. This is signified by a marked decrease in morale from trial-and-error
attempts of learning behaviors considered as inappropriate or appropriate in the host country (Black & Gregersen, 1991).

Oberg (1960) notes that once expatriates are forced to meet the demands of their environment and seriously cope with its real conditions, the second stage of culture shock will begin, *regression*. This stage is portrayed as a “hostile and aggressive attitude towards the host country” (Oberg, 1960, p. 143). This hostility is reinforced by the expatriate’s growing and glaring difficulty with navigating their new environment. Notably, psychosocial processes that exacerbate this stage are the lack of validation and indifference from the host country’s social environment. Host country nationals may appear to be apathetic and callous in this regard. Expats may experience complications with objectively appraising their circumstances and project their unique issues onto the local citizens. Oberg (1960) notes that honest analysis of present conditions and attributable circumstances may elude the expatriate. Specifically, “You will talk as if the difficulties you experienced are more or less created by the people of the host country for your special discomfort” (Oberg, 1960, p. 143). Internally, expatriates may feel frustration and anxiety as a response to their discomfort. Expatriates may begin to reject the new environment and regress to sentiments that place tremendous importance on or irrationally glorify their home country.

In 1988, Black’s earliest conceptualization of expatriate adjustment was defined as a dichotomized continuum between “adjusted/not adjusted” concerning adaptation within the workplace abroad, ability to interact with local nationals, and adaptation to the general environment (Black, 1988). After conjoining expatriate adjustment research with theoretical frameworks of International Human Resources Development, expatriate adjustment was reconceptualized, in 1991, as “the degree of perceived psychological comfort with the new environment or specific facets of one’s life abroad” (Black et al. 1991, p. 499). Contemporary researchers have recognized the subjectivity and idiosyncratic nature of “expatriate adjustment” by including the social constructs with which expatriates perceive their environments. Utilizing person in environment underpinnings, expatriate adjustment was further redefined and conceptualized as “the goodness of fit between the characteristics of the person and the properties of the environment” (Haslberger et al., 2013, p. 334).
The Person-Environment theoretical model advances and defines expatriate adjustment using dimensions of interaction between the expatriate and environment with respect to “1. Needs-Supplies Fit and 2. Demands-Ability Fit” (p. 334). This theory posits that adjustment occurs when the individual and environmental needs are met and maintained. The Needs-Supplies Fit explains that the needs of the individual (internal), in terms of resources and supplies, must be met satisfactorily by the environment. The Demands-Ability fit hypothesizes that the individual must be flexible and willing to meet the environmental requirements (external). In the process of cross-cultural adjustment, expatriates must develop new ways of processing new cultural norms, manage psychological disequilibrium, develop new coping skills, and confront the task of initiating new social support systems.

Building upon expatriate adjustment, Demes & Geeraert (2014) operationalize and scale intercultural mobility by measures of cultural distance, acculturation, and cultural adaptation. Cultural distance posits that the larger the distance between two cultures, the greater the difficulty to adapt. Differential components between home & host country such as climate, language, practicalities (e.g. transportation, shopping), social environment (community size, pace, noise), and value & beliefs help determine an expatriate’s adjustment. Adaptation is categorized into sociocultural or psychological; sociocultural adaptation refers to the practices and behavioral aspects of daily life allowing for navigation such as ease of living, and social norms. Psychological adaptation refers to someone’s general wellbeing or contentment in respect to being in the host country. Emotional determinants such as loneliness, anxiety, autonomy, excitement, and frustration are specific indicators of psychological adaptation (Demes & Geeraert, 2014). Acculturation orientation is conceptualized as an expatriate’s preference for home or host country cultures across a number of areas, such as friendships, country characteristics, and willingness to adopt the manner of host county norms. Two points further dichotomize acculturation orientation: “1) how important or valuable maintaining one’s own cultural heritage is while in the host country or 2) the importance or value placed on participating in the host country’s culture” (Demes & Geeraert, 2014, p. 94).
Expatriate adjustment is further analyzed and categorized into three dimensions of cognitive, affective, and behavioral. In recognizing that expatriate adjustment is comprised of variables that further hinder or foster adjustment, cross-cultural adjustment is assessed against adequacy standards set by the environment and internally by the expatriate (Haslberger et al., 2013). Stress-related triggers bring relatively minor changes resulting in matched demands. If these coping mechanisms are successful, the individual will acquire new resources and capabilities that prompt changes. In primitive studies concerning expatriate adjustment, the social construct or framework of adjustment was perceived as one-dimensional without much attention to its subtleties. For example, an individual can practice the social behaviors of the environment but internally reject the nuances of a novelty culture. In this example, an expatriate’s behavioral dimension of adjustment is aligned but still has cognitive maladjustment. On the converse, the good cognitive adjustment does not mean behavioral or affective adjustment is aligned as well.

Haslberger (2013) describes the Cognitive Dimension of expatriate adjustment beginning with a simple cognitive representation, or idea, about the host environment. In acclimating to their environment, the expatriate learns the inaccuracies of his/her frame of reference. The difficulties in interpreting environmental interactions (e.g., attitudes, values, beliefs) or making sense of behaviors, guided by the initial frame of reference, create uncertainties. Aligned interactions that are clearly understood, effective, and interpreted correctly will provide certainty. In an individual’s effort to reduce uncertainties, the expatriate will increase interactional predictability by supplementing old, inappropriate mental frameworks with new elements. This process can be exacerbated without the presence of an effective social support system. Haslberger et al. (2013) explains, “In high context, or unfamiliar cultures, there may be few elements of reference available to the expatriate early on to guide behavior, leading to cognitive or pervasive ambiguity” (Haslberger et al., 2013, p. 338). The Cognitive Dimension has both an internal and external aspect. The internal aspect relates to the certainty of the expatriate’s knowledge base or cognitive frame. The external aspect describes the strength of the cognitive frame or knowledge base of the expatriate. In this respect, the external environment will set the adequacy standards for knowledge.
The Affective Domain acknowledges the moods and emotions that relate to the overall context of the expatriate’s transition. Collectively, moods and emotions constitute the affective state of expatriate adjustment. A commonly understudied component within adjustment is how the expatriate chooses to express their feelings and manage interpersonal challenges. Emotional Labor is described as “the act of displaying the appropriate emotion” (Ashforth, 1993, p. 90). Emotional labor is often developed in the expatriate’s early social or cultural environment and can be incongruent to the host environment. In international environments, the individual must relegate their emotional labor to the standard, local, normative displays. A well-adjusted expatriate in the Affective Domain will display effective, appropriate affect according to local customs. The Affective Domain is divided between internal and external aspects. The internal aspect sets the adequacy standard for feelings; the external aspect refers to the display rules for affect in the host society, and the environment sets the adequacy standards (Haslberger et al., 2013).

The Behavioral Domain is characterized by the adequacy or congruency of the expatriate’s behavior in the host environment. Initially, the congruency of an expatriate’s behavior will be relatively low depending on how culturally distant the host country is. Behaviors should be appropriate, acceptable to members of the host population, and effective, leading to the desired result by the expatriate. An example of this is an American expatriate transitioning to an Arab country. While the American’s communication and social graces may be effective, the appropriateness, or acceptability, of clothing and behavioral measures in holy areas will contribute to their overall acceptance within the culture. The Behavioral Domain is divided into internal and external aspects. The internal aspect refers to the effectiveness of the behavior of which the expatriate sets the adequacy standards of effectiveness. The external aspect relates to the appropriateness of the behavior of, which the environment sets the adequacy standards (Haslberger et al., 2013).

Biedermann (2017) likened the impact of stressors from military relocation to a “pebble dropped in a pond, where the ripples extend far out beyond the drop zone” (p. 53). Biedermann (2017) conducted a qualitative study of 23 female military spouses of the ADF (Australian Defense Force) who accompanied
their service-member spouse to an overseas post. Similar to Haslberger et al. (2013) findings, all participants agreed that overseas postings required numerous “physical, psychosocial, and cognitive adjustments” (Biedermann, 2017, p. 54). This study uncovered four common themes from interviews with ADF military spouses (12 Army spouses, 9 Royal Australian Air Force spouses, and 2 Royal Australian Navy spouses): 1. Sacrifices for the good of the family, 2. Adjustments to a new environment, 3. Seeking support, and 4. Personality and resilience (Biedermann, 2017).

Theme 1, Sacrifices for the good of the family, highlighted the military spouses’ obligation to prioritize the family above themselves (Biedermann, 2017). Participants described their perceptive sacrifices of accompaniment on foreign installations mirroring the service member’s sacrifice to their country. Participating spouses described their sacrifices as being expected and accepted within the ADF military culture. Sacrifices of employment and the loss of income influenced the spouses’ attitudes toward money and negatively influenced their sense of identity (Biedermann, 2017). Participants felt an obligatory relinquishment of control regularly to meet the needs of their spouse’s military service. Theme 2, Adjustment to a new environment, represented the participants’ responses to the adjustment difficulties to their foreign posts. Participants described needing to adjust to the language barriers, isolation from other Australian families, climate differences, social norms, and traffic patterns. Participants noted that two types of adjustment were necessary: adjusting to the military community and the host nation. (Biedermann, 2017).

Seeking support, Theme 3, is parallel with the findings of Blakely’s (2014) research that suggests informal social supports are more effective than formal supports. Participants described the formal, higher-level social supports as ineffective due to their inability to provide companionship and friendship. While the formal supports provided tours around the community, the informal supports helped with more relevant issues such as establishing a local bank account, enrolling children in school, and paying utilities (Bierdermann, 2017). Additionally, obtaining social support was reportedly more difficult for military spouses without children. Theme 4, Personality and resilience, details the suggested key personality traits
that ADF military spouses cite as significantly impacting adjustment. Participants described having a degree of local basic language skills, a positive attitude, and knowledge of cultural norms to increase the enjoyability of the foreign post (Bierdermann, 2017).

Using semi-structured interviews, a qualitative study of 13 US military spouses living in Northern Italy was conducted and found six recurring themes (Elliot, 2020). The purpose of this study was to narrate the transitional experiences of sojourning military spouses for military service and the additional stressors that occur. Six themes representing the transitional experiences included, “1. Adding stress to an already stressful situation, 2. Managing a new set of worries and fears surrounded by the unknown, 3. Reestablishing an everyday life from chaos, 4. Battling social/personal/physical isolation, 5. Reinventing myself to move beyond simply functioning to control, and 6. Pondering about life/returning/repatriation” (Elliot, 2020, p. 1). Research participants were included in this study if they were a spouse of an active-duty service member, resided in Italy for at least ten months, and if Italy was their first OCONUS duty station. All of the participants were female military spouses with an average age of 31.

Theme 1, adding stress to an already stressful situation, discusses the additional stressors and burdens of relocation that participants had minimal previous experiences with or control over (Elliot, 2020). Within this theme, participants identified frustrations with unforeseen financial costs related to moving, scheduling animals for air travel, inconsistent information/processes with obtaining Visas and clearances, renting or selling their homes, purging unwanted items before relocating, staying in hotels for four weeks or more, and out of pocket costs associated with the house hunting process. Theme 2, managing a new set of worries and fears surrounded by the unknown, highlighted the initial emotional angst spouses felt when acclimating to their surroundings and unforeseen consequences (Elliot, 2020). Participants described feeling nervous and afraid to interact with the local environment due to the language barriers and perceptions of Italians. Anxiety around understanding cultural norms and attempting routine tasks, such as paying bills, grocery shopping, setting up a bank account, was further complicated due to unfamiliarity with the culture. Additionally, the majority of participants were anxious about this particular installation
not having an emergency room and a lack of medical services. One spouse expressed, “there is no emergency room on base, and I have to go to the Italians and there’s a potential language issue there, having children where anything can happen, that’s a concern” (Elliot, 2020, p. 4). A widespread confusion and fear about anticipated role changes and employability was discussed. Military spouses described leaving “respectable jobs” and how having a break/gap in their profession was troublesome.

Theme 3, *reestablishing an everyday life from chaos*, captures the participants’ realization of their need to adapt and accept the cultural nuances of their environment. This theme describes the “journey after the initial chaos of the transition subsides and real-life resumed, occurring after 3-9 months” (Elliot, 2020, p. 4). *Battling social/physical/and personal isolation*, Theme 4, was experienced by all participants and was further complicated by a sense of loss. Participants cited a loss of routine, purpose, and rhythm stemming from a loss of employment. Making matters worse, the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between Italy and America prohibited spouses from working outside of the base. Theme 5, *Reinventing Myself to Move Beyond Simply Functioning to Control*, “encompasses the concerted effort participants took to move beyond just functioning daily, occurring somewhere between nine and twelve months for most” (p. 5). Participants described a recognition and reevaluation of personal goals and needs. The discomfort of immersing within the local community had subsided as participants learned how to adapt. Additionally, sentiments of acceptance of the inconveniences and differences within their local environment compared to the ease of the United States were more prevalent. Theme 6, *Pondering About Life, Returning, and Repatriation*, occurred due to participants being fully immersed in Italian culture and concern about returning to a fast-paced environment in the United States. Sentiments of appreciation for Italian cultures were expressed as participants described their ability to live intentionally and on purpose. Participants perceived that Italian culture allowed them to “value their time and focus more on health and well-being of the individual and family compared to America” (p.6).

The findings of this study suggest that military spouses, on foreign installations, may experience difficulties with role insufficiencies, grief, and loss. Feeling a loss of purpose can stem from a loss of
employment, routine, loss of networks, and loss of identity (Elliot, 2020). The temporality of the transition to a foreign installation can hasten spouses’ efforts to develop their confidence and coping mechanisms in order to acclimate themselves to the local culture. Adjustment processes and thematic arguments of this research study parallel the findings of spouses of expatriate employees. The authors note a limitation of this study as their inability to converse with and include spouses who “as a result of maladaptation or poor adjustment, returned to the United States before the service member completed their service obligation” (Elliot, 2020, p. 7). Secondly, the authors did not include the experiences of military spouses who had transitioned to a foreign installation before. Consequently, the findings of this study cannot be generalized for all military spouses who PCS to foreign installations. Another limitation of this study, similar to most studies on expatriate and military spouses, is the lack of representation of male military spouses.

A study investigating the health care needs of military families whose service member was in a deployed (DEP), intermittently deployed (ID), and nondeployed status (ND), was conducted in Okinawa, Japan (Fisher-McNulty, 2003). In Okinawa, Japan, a secluded island of multiple military installations and branches, the stressors are exacerbated. The author notes that stressors include left-side driving difficulties, expensive off-base purchases, limited spousal employment opportunities, cultural challenges, and subtropical climate challenges (Fisher-McNulty, 2003). This study included 299 families, of which only 99 families remained for the entire study. Eighty percent of the sample identified as Marine families. The research study was conducted for over six months and “measured for levels of self-reliance, coherence, social support, well-being, adaptation, coping, anxiety, and health care visits” (Fisher-McNulty, 2003, p. 465). The author hypothesized that families stationed overseas would “manifest increased health care use during periods of deployment as compared with families who remain in an intact unit” (p. 466). The number and type of health care visits sought by families enrolled in the study were recorded and analyzed.

The initial sample characteristics included 162 families considered nondeployed and 137 as deployed. The entire sample was female, and 70% were between the ages of 24-35 (Fisher-McNulty, 2003). For more than 80% of the sample, Okinawa was their first overseas duty station. The study's findings
suggests that the spouses of deployed servicemembers utilized health care services at the same rate as the nondeployed spouses. However, spouses with children utilized health care services more than spouses without children for routine health care visits. Concerning mental health, 18% of spouses of non-deployed service members and 20% of deployed spouses had prior mental health counseling. Of the entire sample, 28% were identified as high risk for mental health concerns warranting a psychiatric consultation. Most importantly, what the authors found instead was an alarming rate of spouses exhibiting “sadness, anger, and signs of depression while stationed overseas” (Fisher-McNulty, 2003, p. 470). Caretakers of children had higher levels of stress in both the nondeployed and deployed military spouse groups.

C. Employment

Although limited, there is growing international literature examining the inherent difficulties experienced by military spouses in obtaining and maintaining employment because of their international military relocation. Research from studies conducted on military spousal employment, domestic or international, show that spouses are likelier to be unemployed and earning less than their civilian counterparts, despite their education and experience (Booth, 2003; Maury & Brice, 2017). There are numerous obstacles and barriers to employment as a military spouse, and these are much more common on foreign installations. Military families of each branch often experience relocations to OCONUS (Outside the Continental US) bases, which can disrupt current employment and completion of higher education programs. This section will examine how military life affects employment for military spouses, the benefits of military spouse employment, and the ramifications on spousal well-being.

Ongoing research suggests a gap between desired and realized employment outcomes for military spouses (Harrell et al., 2004). Among activity-duty spouses, 41% reported being employed, while 58% of military spouses reported a need to work, and an overall 82% expressed a desire to work (Harrell et al., 2004). There is evidence that military spouses are often underemployed, overqualified, or unable to work full time. Unemployment rates among military spouses are higher than civilian spouses. Harrell et al.
(2004) conducted a study over 1100 military spouses that revealed 38% of military wives’ level of education was relatively higher for their current jobs compared to the 6% of civilians whose education level surpassed expectations for their jobs. The incongruency of employment outcomes can be attributed to the unique obstacles faced by military spouses, such as frequent PCS moves and job type availability. According to Maury and Stone (2014), 28% of military wives were not working due to the incongruence of jobs matching their particular qualifications and skills. In the 2017 Military Family Lifestyle Survey, 55% of military spouses were considered “underemployed,” meaning spouses were categorized as either overqualified, underpaid, or underutilized in their current roles (Tong et al., 2018). Additionally, the survey found that 41% of military spouses were earning less than half of their previous highest salary (Tong et al., 2018). Spouses that are considered more vulnerable or susceptible to poorer employment outcomes with larger wage-earning losses are older spouses, spouses with younger children, and male spouses.

In their 9th annual Military Family Life Study, Blue Star Families found that employment was the 2nd most important issue for military spouses (Blue Star Families, 2018). While 51% of spouses reported “time away from family” or deployment as their main issue, 45% of spouses reported that it was employment. In the current annual study, 70% of spouses reported two incomes as vital for their family’s well-being, a contrast from the previous 63% of respondents. Concerning financial security for the future, 37% of military spouses reported feeling moderately or very insecure concerning their financial health (Blue Star Families, 2018). Among the 46% of spouses who reported full/time work status, 56% reported underemployment. This study was conducted from April to June 2018 and had over 10,000 participants, including spouses (veteran and active duty), veterans, and service members.

Employment's psychological and financial benefits are pervasive and have positive implications for service members’ retention efforts. Trewick and Muller (2014) categorize meaningful employment as having either Latent or Manifest benefits (LAMB). Latent benefits include having a structured day, status associated with employment, a sense of purpose, social connectedness with colleagues, and compelled force. Manifest benefits include increased incomes, a key indicator of psychological wellbeing and quality
of life (Trewick et al., 2018). In Australia, a study was conducted to explore employment, latent and manifest benefits, wellbeing, and quality of life (QOL) in 289 Australian Defense Force Military Spouses (286 females, 3 males). Results indicated significant differences among the 156 employed and 133 unemployed spouses’ psychological well-being and quality of life. The unemployed spouses experienced higher levels of psychological distress and had minimal access to Latent and Manifest Benefits. Additionally, the study found that hidden employment, such as volunteering, household work, parenting, and unregistered jobs provided latent benefits of social connection and time structure. (Trewick et al., 2018)

Earlier studies have underscored similar findings surrounding the benefits of employment. Manning and DeRouin (1981) researched employment benefits for military spouses from a field artillery battalion in West Germany. The study found that employed wives of Army service members fared better psychologically than unemployed military spouses (Manning & DeRouin, 1981). Questionnaires were provided to 111 soldiers and their spouses; the questionnaires, using a Likert Scale, assessed “1. Daily Living, 2. Marriage & Family Living, and 3. Problem Solving in the Military Community” (Manning & DeRouin, 1981, p. 726). The study found that both working and nonworking military spouses experienced the same classes of problems; however, nonworking military spouses experienced their problems on a more acute level. Working military spouses cited that working helped create exposure to other community members and helped build friendships. Many spouses reported the social connections and networking factors were often more important than the pay itself. Additionally, working military spouses were better adjusted, more adventurous, and functioned more independently. In line with the latent benefits of employment by Trewick et al. (2018), this study found that nonworking spouses were more satisfied if deeply involved with one or more nonpaying activities on the installation. Lastly, service members of working spouses reported being more satisfied with home life than the service members of spouses without jobs (Manning & DeRouin, 1981).
Military spousal employment is significant for family financial health, military personnel retention, and provides a sense of purpose for military spouses’ physical & mental well-being (Atkins, 2009). Military spouses often experience underemployment difficulties due to inequities between educational requirements of the job market, job availability, and qualifications of the military spouse, especially in more rural, isolated areas (Lim & Schulker, 2010). Accompanied PCS moves are associated with poorer employment outcomes for military spouses on foreign and domestic installations (Gribble et al., 2018). Military spouses are less likely to work full time and/or work fewer weeks during the year in comparison to civilian spouses and male military spouses (Cooke & Speirs, 2005; Hosek et al., 2002). On foreign accompaniment, depending on the host country, military spouses’ employment opportunities are often limited or unavailable due to country restrictions or employment laws for SOFA (Status Forces of Agreement) members (Gribble et al., 2018).

In a semi-structured, qualitative study of 19 British Army/ Royal Air Force spouses, participants reported frustration over lack of agency and choices regarding employment and career opportunities (Gribble et al., 2018). Responses from participants uncovered four major themes concerning the influence of employment on their well-being: identity, agency, self-worth, and connectedness. The theme of identity captured the inner conflicts between the social roles of mother, military wife, and employee. Some participants described the role of employee as integral to their identity construction and productivity. However, the intersection of employee and mother was met with ambivalence as spouses described feeling divided between the competing demands of work and parenting. The identity of military wife was met with resistance, and some participants cited using employment to reassert their independence. One spouse lamented, “I felt bored! Frustrated..kinda a bit useless really. I just felt like that spouse on someone’s arm…I like to go and make my own money. I don’t like to rely on people, and I had to rely on my husband for everything out here” (p. 6). Nonworking spouses, who disliked the imposed identity of military wife, felt their perceived independence and status, earned from previous employment, was challenged (Gribble et al., 2018).
The theme of *Agency* represented military life’s influence on spouses’ ability to plan and make decisions concerning their employment. Two sub-themes of *choice/control* and *concessions* represented the prominent view among spouses that “accompanied postings limited their ability to have choice and control over their career or employment” (Gribble et al. 2018, p. 6). Spouses described the sacrifices made toward education and employment due to restrictions encountered through foreign accompaniment. One spouse stated, “I desperately wanted to work, and I did find a job eventually. But I found myself in a real sort of trench of depression because I just couldn’t see where my life was going I suppose” (p. 6). Spouses who were unable to find unemployment but able to locate volunteer opportunities could mitigate the negative effects of foreign accompaniment. Spouses gained a sense of connection, purpose, and value through volunteering within the military community.

*Self-confidence and connectedness* reflect the beneficial experiences of employment for military spouses. Obtaining employment helped spouses to overcome barriers and challenges, contributing to personal growth and confidence (Gribble et al., 2018). Some spouses were returning to work after years of unemployment or caregiving for children. This dynamic created anxiety and uncertainty; returning to work restored assurance, certainty, and validation. One spouse described, “when I went back to work after eleven years out of the workplace, it was quite daunting in terms of my confidence. Even though I had the academic ability on paper, it didn’t feel like it. And even though I know I had a brain; it didn’t feel like it inside” (p. 6). Additionally, participants reported utilizing employment as an opportunity for establishing social connections. Mixed reports of loss of achievement and pride from earning their own money and contributing to the family unit were expressed. Responses varied regarding the extent to which spouses prioritized employment over their role as stay-at-home parents.

Harvey and Buckley’s (1998) stages of a nonmilitary expatriate spouses’ career life cycle predict the potential effectiveness of spousal employment assistance programs; the life cycles are classified into three stages of *initial career stage*, *growth/establishment* stage, and the *maintenance* stage (Harvey et al., 1998). During the initial career stage, an expatriate spouse’s career stage involves trial, flexibility, and
exploration, during which an international relocation can be perceived as an opportunity to gain academic credits or explore potential career ventures. An example of this is an expatriate spouse volunteering locally in the host country while attending school online. The growth/establishment stage marks a period where expatriate spouses are under pressure to prove their competence and demonstrate their future potential. For example, a spouse’s desire to work may be influenced by the need for practicum or field hours to maintain licensure. Interruption of employment in this stage can disrupt their career and tenure in specialized professions. In the maintenance stage, the expatriate spouse is vested and may occupy senior management, tenured leadership in their organization, or business ownership, making their relocation more difficult. In a spouse’s declining stages of their career life cycle, an international relocation may function more as a sabbatical or retirement phase. The spousal employment assistance programs are most beneficial for spouses in the growth/establishment stage and initial stages of their career (Harvey et al., 1998). Spouses with a “career” orientation are psychologically vested and committed to their profession and may experience stress from career separation incurred during relocation. Career-oriented spouses may benefit more from spousal employee assistance programs than spouses with an “income” orientation. Spouses who are income-oriented may benefit less from utilizing employee assistance programs and obtaining specialized employment (Cole, 2011).

VII. Conclusion

The male spouse is relatively understudied and absent in the extensive research conducted on military families. Programmatic gaps and limited data exist for this spousal subgroup, which comprises 9.1% (54,831) of the Active-Duty spouse population (DOD, 2019). Culminating factors, such as the repealing of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” and the legalization of same-sex marriage, have expanded the military’s concept of the male spouse, female service member, and military family structures. Much of the foundational knowledge, advocacy, and history of foreign accompaniment was developed and shaped for the needs of female spouses in heterosexual marriages. Consequently, the intricate needs of male spouses who relocate overseas are still largely unknown and/or absent in programming. Though the Department of
Defense has progressed in responding to personnel's family and operational needs through comprehensive benefits and family welfare programming, challenges of disrupted social supports, cultural maladjustment, and spousal career disruption due to foreign relocation persists (Clever & Segal, 2013). These recurring issues have been linked to the influence of health and well-being for the military spouse and the service member. Though problematic for all military spouses, the themes of social support, employment, and adjustment are often examined through a female military spouse’s lens. There is a dearth of information on how the aforementioned themes are perceived and applied to male spouses. The study that follows aims to fill that gap by exploring the themes of cross-cultural adjustment, employment, and social supports from the perspectives of male spouses who have relocated overseas and currently reside in Yokosuka, Japan, the largest Naval base outside the continental U.S. (OCONUS).
Paper Two: Researching the Experiences of Male Military Spouses in Yokosuka, Japan

I. Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (Yokosuka, Japan)

Established in the late 1800s as a shipyard, on August 30th, 1945, Yokosuka Navy Yard became occupied by U.S. Marines, British Marines, and Navy Personnel. Shortly thereafter, Yokosuka Navy Yard was renamed COMFLEACT (Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka), CFAY, and expanded from the original 280 acres to 568 acres. Located 43 miles south of Tokyo, CFAY is the largest overseas Naval Base and is home to 71 shore-based tenant commands and 13 forward-deployed ships. CFAY is considered home to approximately 24,000 military and civilian personnel; and is located in the city of Yokosuka, on the Miura Peninsula, within the Kanagawa Prefecture. It boasts the largest Naval hospital in mainland Japan, the largest MWR (Morale, Welfare, Recreation) program within DOD, and the largest overseas revenue-producing Navy Exchange. CFAY includes a second housing base attachment, Ikego Hills, in Zushi City. Additionally, the installation is equipped with DODEA schools, a Navy college, Community Bank & Navy Federal Bank, and has the largest Command religious program in the Navy (Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka, 2021).

II. Research Design

As an exploratory study, eight semi-structured interviews were conducted to better understand the adjustment experiences of male military spouses on foreign installations. The researcher used the following research questions to guide the interviews:

A. What cross-cultural adjustment experiences do male military spouses experience on foreign installations?

B. What coping practices do male military spouses use to increase their adjustment on foreign installations?

C. What psychological stressors do male military spouses identify that they experience on foreign installations?
D. What programmatic or policy changes do male military spouses believe will increase their adjustment on foreign installations?

Participants (N=8) are male military spouses whose service member spouse is stationed at Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka, the largest Naval base overseas. The researcher used a Transcendental Phenomenological Approach for this study to understand the shared experiences of male military spouses on their first foreign PCS (Permanent Change of Station) relocation. Padgett (2017) describes the purpose of Phenomenological research as being to capture the deeper meanings or the lived experiences of participants. Phenomenological studies have been used to understand commonly shared experiences in greater detail, and to use these experiences to shape policies and programs. By flagging key quotes, common statements, and identifying relevant contexts, researchers can identify themes and begin phenomenological analysis. Creswell (2007) describes two forms of Phenomenological research, Hermeneutical and Transcendental Phenomenology. While Hermeneutical Phenomenology seeks to synthesize and interpret the meaning of the lived experiences, Transcendental Phenomenology focuses on the experiences of participants and less on the interpretation by the researcher. Moustakas (1994) explains the steps of this process as collecting data from those experiencing the phenomenon, bracketing out your experiences, reducing the data to highlight important statements, and synthesizing data to develop common themes.

III. Sampling and Recruitment

Recruitment began after receiving approval from the University of Pennsylvania’s Institutional Review Board. Purposive Sampling was used to recruit participants through Facebook Groups, including Yokosuka Military Spouses, Ikego Community Support, Sistas of CFAY, and BGM Yokosuka. Social media sites were primarily used because social media was the central hub of the community during the coronavirus pandemic. The researcher posted a Recruitment Flier which included the researcher’s contact information (See Appendix A) in the aforementioned social media groups. Snowball Sampling was also utilized to recruit additional participants by asking research participants to distribute researcher’s email to
other eligible candidates. The researcher intended to recruit a maximum of five participants but received an overwhelming response of 13 eligible research participants. Once research participants expressed initial interest in the study by emailing the researcher, an Intake Form (See Appendix B) and Informed Consent Form (See Appendix C) were sent as a reply to further screen information and eligibility of potential research participants. Of the 13 participants who responded, only eight eligible participants completed the intake form, signed a consent form, and participated in an interview.

The Inclusionary Criteria of the study required that participants identify as male, be command sponsored (on their service member’s orders), at least 18 years of age, agree to sign the consent form, and commit to completing the interview through Zoom. Exclusionary criteria included participants who were considered Dual Military, were not command sponsored, were underage, unable to speak English, and those whose spouses were not considered Active-Duty military. The researcher did not restrict participants based on whether or not they had PCSed before or had previous international experience. The researcher did not restrict participants based on their nationality or time spent in Japan. The study yielded (N=8) eight participants who were ALL on their first OCONUS PCS move. Of the eight participants, seven identified as American, and one participant identified as African and Italian. Two research participants were spouses of Enlisted service members, while six participants were spouses of Officers. Two participants were in same-sex marriages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants (Pseudonyms)</th>
<th>Time in Yokosuka</th>
<th>Employed</th>
<th># of PCS moves (CONUS)</th>
<th>Officer or Enlisted Spouse</th>
<th>Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cory</td>
<td>1 year, 7 months</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Officer</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Officer</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Officer</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>2 years 5 months</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Officer</td>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ernest</td>
<td>2 years 7 months</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Enlisted</td>
<td>African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>1 year, 4 months</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Enlisted</td>
<td>African/Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander</td>
<td>1 year, 10 months</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Officer</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Officer</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
IV. Data Collection

Data collection was conducted using semi-structured interviews through a HIPAA compliant version of Zoom. Interview questions were structured to elicit open-ended feedback about the cross-cultural adjustment experiences of male military spouses. Participants were prompted to email the researcher if interested in being included in the study. An intake form was sent through Google Docs, while informed consent forms were scanned and emailed to the researcher or requested through DocuSign’s electronic signature website. Research participants were prompted to not include their full name on the intake forms but to instead use their initials. The intake forms contained their email addresses and are being stored in an encrypted file. Interview transcriptions were conducted through Zoom and Rev.com; participants’ names were not included in the interview nor on the transcription. Zoom interviews were recorded and stored on the researcher’s computer in an encrypted file along with the consent and intake forms.

The interview guide (See Appendix D) was developed by the researcher and revised by the dissertation committee to ensure that questions were open-ended and elicited wider responses around the cross-cultural adjustment of male spouses. The researcher developed an open-ended interview guide with probes for each question where some questions were anticipated and others were spontaneous. The first part of the interview was organized around topical areas that were initially arranged around participants’ attitudes when learning of their relocation to Japan and questions that centered on how they prepared for the relocation. The second part of the interview guide probed how the host country influenced the participants’ quality of life and their description of the experience from a cultural perspective. The third section of the interview focused on participants’ employment experiences before the relocation and afterwards. In this part of the interview, the researcher probed with questions that focused on the significance of employment and the resources participants used to obtain employment. Lastly, the researcher focused on the experiences of living abroad by eliciting responses around unforeseen stressors and enjoyments. The last question asked research participants how they perceived their experience as different from female spouses.
V. Data Analysis

Using a Transcendental Phenomenological approach, the researcher began with recording semi-structured interviews. Interviews were recorded and transcribed through Zoom initially and further transcribed through Rev.com. The researcher reviewed the interview transcripts to determine the accuracy and to note implicit meanings not captured in the transcript. Once the researcher reviewed the transcript for accuracy with each interview, the researcher completed a brief, line-by-line open coding of content by identifying broader labels of descriptive features capturing emotion and perspectives. Broader labels were assigned to the content, i.e., job security, friends, teamwork, support, previous international experience, decision making, beliefs about military programs, resilience, taking the initiative, preparation, first PCS experience, etc. A second line-by-line coding was conducted for greater selectivity to deduce meanings and correlations from participant responses. Afterwards, a code book was developed, compiling several themes, upwards of 26, and synthesizing themes from each interview.

After carefully reviewing each theme within the codebook, the researcher noted recurring themes that were related across interviews. Three initial themes (Career Mobility, Employment Experiences, Employment Barriers) were all collapsed into the central theme of Employment. Five initial themes (PCS Stressors, Preparation Difficulties, COVID Restrictions, Stressors, Loss and Sacrifice) were collectively categorized as Stressors. Another seven initial themes (Feeling Safer in Japan, Cultural Insight, Interactions with Japanese, Good Surprises, Language Barriers, Experiencing the Country, Initial Feelings about Japan) were collectively named Cross-Cultural Adjustment. With the emerging subtheme, Adjusting to Military Culture, the researcher had to acknowledge that adjustment was a more composite theme. The central theme of Cross-Cultural Adjustment was later modified to Adjustment in order to include participants’ perspectives concerning adjustment difficulties to the military culture, loss of employment, and role flexibilities. Three recurring themes (Support, Support Barriers, Limitations to Using Military Programs) were integrated as a central theme of Support. Codes that emphasized the male military experience, such as Male Spouse Perspective, Internal Beliefs/Biases, were grouped as the central theme of The Male Military Spouse Perspective. A sixth theme of Family Systems was considered, but there were
too few excerpts, and the content was too thin. Two initial themes of Previous PCS Experience and Previous International Experience were dropped and absorbed by the larger theme of Adjustment. Prior Military Experience was an initial theme that emerged after two participants described their experiences growing up in military families and how this shaped their readiness for an OCONUS PCS. Though this initial theme was relevant for only two participants, the codes were later added to Adjustment as a Protective Factor. The researcher anticipated adding Coping Strategies as a subtheme of Stressfulness, but this initial theme also received fewer codes. Padgett (2017) explains that codes are often excluded for there being too few excerpts or codes being absorbed by other themes. Additionally, Padgett (2017) states that coding starts “at a broader level and gradually contracts into greater selectivity and interpretive synthesis. Meaning units often consist of events or incidents and the personal reflections that come with talking about them. Participant’s recollections are coded for their meanings with an eye to broader considerations” (p. 164).

Once the codes were synthesized, the researcher re-examined the codes by dimensions of the larger emerging code and assigned them to specific varying descriptive levels. After revising the codebook, the researcher noted that some codes could not be included, even as a sub-theme, for their lack of relevance with most participants. The resulting themes and sub-themes were: The Utility of Relevant Support (Informal Supports, Formal Supports, Support Barriers), Stressfulness (PCS Stressors, Psychosocial Stressors, Environmental Stressors), Employment (Employment Experiences & Mobility, Beliefs about Employment & Its Significance, Employment Barriers), The Male Spouse Perspective (Parameters, Perceived Differences from Female Spouses, Injured Masculinity), and Adjustment (Joint Decision Making, Relationships with Local Hosts & Japanese Culture, Risk Factors v. Protective Factors, Safety).
VI. Organization of Findings

From the participants' responses, five themes emerged: The Utility of Relevant Support, Stressfulness, Employment, The Male Spouse Perspective, and Adjustment. Each theme has subthemes that provide perspectives around the dynamics of the larger themes.

Eight men were interviewed. These are their basic facts and brief profiles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexander</td>
<td>Currently works in Computer Science. Father of 2 and has resided with his wife in Yokosuka for approximately two years. Wife is an Officer in the Navy. Alexander was raised in a military household and has traveled and lived internationally within his career and as a military child. His family PCSed from the West Coast, and this is their first OCONUS PCS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel</td>
<td>Has travelled and lived internationally before, including Japan. Samuel is familiar with Japanese culture and has some command of the language. His husband is an Officer in the Navy, and this is their first OCONUS PCS experience. Samuel is still fairly new to Yokosuka and arrived when COVID restrictions were more rigid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ernest</td>
<td>Relocated to Yokosuka with his wife and child three years ago from the Southeast region of the United States. Ernest has experience in Landscaping and Operations Mgmt. His wife is an Enlisted service member, and this is their 2nd PCS experience, though their first OCONUS PCS. Enjoys spending time with his son.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>Utilized the Military Spousal Preference program to transfer jobs from the East Coast to an agency in Yokosuka. Patrick and his wife have been in Yokosuka for over three years and thoroughly enjoy it. This is Patrick’s first experience living overseas, though he has PCSed before within the states. His wife is a Navy Officer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>A registered nurse from the East Coast. Has experience with the military as a military child and travelled to Yokosuka before relocating from the East Coast. Loves Japan and loves thrifting. Joseph has been in Japan for almost three years with his husband, a Navy Officer. Joseph has utilized his time in Japan for graduate studies by pursuing his Masters. First time living on base and first formal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>PCS experience with his husband.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry</td>
<td>Barry and his wife, a Navy Officer, PCSed to Yokosuka from the West Coast about a year ago. Barry works in Data Science and Analytics within a local Japanese firm and has travelled internationally before. This is their first OCONUS PCS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>Nathan is an Italian citizen who PCSed with his wife and two children to Yokosuka approximately two years ago. Nathan owned a Club in Italy and formed an entertainment corporation with his business partners before traveling to Yokosuka. His wife is an Enlisted service member, and this is their first PCS experience together. Nathan is new to the military culture as well. Nathan enjoys working out and spending time with family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cory</td>
<td>Cory is a Software Engineer who has PCSed more than five times and is from the West Coast. He and his wife, a Navy Officer, have two children and have resided in Yokosuka for nearly two years. Cory is an avid runner and works from home. This is his family’s first time PCSing overseas.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A. The Utility of Relevant Support

Research participants were asked to identify relevant supports that were significant to their adjustment and functioning as a male military spouse relocating overseas. The answers evoked varied sentiments about supports offered at CFAY (Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka), revealing a propensity towards supports that began at the community level or informal supports. Participants shared evaluative responses that gave shape to the utility of supports as well as barriers. A theme concerning The Utility of Relevant Support emerged. The Utility of Relevant Support is defined as relevant relationships that people have with other people, groups, and organizations from which they derive help and assistance and through which they fulfill certain social, emotional, and material needs. The emphasis on “relevant” support signifies that though there are a plethora of supports available for military spouses at CFAY, participants utilized a handful of supports that were “relevant” for their specific needs. This theme is further categorized into three subthemes of: Informal Support, Formal Support, and Support Barriers.

Informal support is defined as support derived from networks that consists of other military spouses, extended family, friends, neighbors, and social media communities. All research participants
described multiple uses of informal supports and identified them as helpful during their onboarding and transitional periods. One research participant, Ernest, shared how the informal support of a neighbor was utilized during his initial arrival in Yokosuka: “My neighbor was a godsend, she introduced me to some people. By the time I looked up, I got a car waiting outside for me in the parking lot. He told me to pay him $300 for it. He knew, I ain’t have a job at the time, he was like don’t worry about it just like, you know, get it to me when you got it. You ain’t gotta pay me in installments or nothing like that...just give it to me when you got it. ET” Ernest described the significance of informal supports buffering the stress that stemmed from his wife deploying within a week of their arrival to Yokosuka. Ernest continued, “She had to do this and do that, and then they flew her to another base and then flew her to the ship because her ship was already deployed. She was in the hotel with us for maybe about a week and then she was gone for five months. She was here long enough to say go here or go there in case you lose your ID. I just walked the base a little with my son and found a couple of spots. God provided great people that helped me out. I didn’t do AOB [Area Orientation Brief] until after she came back. But it was the neighbors before AOB. By the time she [wife] came back, I was already driving. ET” Though Ernest appraised his PCS arrival experience as stressful, his post-arrival resources were sufficient; therefore, there were more opportunities for growth and mastery. Stress & Coping Theory describes stressful appraisals being moderated by the individual’s evaluative judgments of the control they believe they can exert and if resources are abundant (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987).

Another participant, Barry, described how the use of informal supports was instrumental in helping his family manage the logistics of moving from the hotel to their final residence. More specifically, Barry arrived to CFAY when COVID restrictions were more stringent, requiring new arrivals to quarantine for two weeks. Barry describes, “There were also like Facebook forums where after we got out of quarantine for the first two weeks, we’re just trying to figure out like how do we even get all of our stuff to, you know, where we’re going to be living, and this is another thing, my wife was like really on top of it, like she posted in the Facebook page like, hey is there anyone that could come pick us up from the Navy lodge to like take us to where we’re going to be living and there were some people that volunteered right away to come pick
us up from the Navy Lodge, with all of our stuff, like I think we had four or five large suitcases and then just drove us to where we’re going to be living. So, the support around the community that lives here was very helpful. BH” All research participants mentioned the use of community Facebook groups as helpful in receiving immediate answers with diverse perspectives. One research participant, Joseph, noted specifically, “There is a group called the Yokosuka Military spouses, which is through Facebook. You know, you post a question, and bam, you would get something immediately, plus they’re extremely helpful. JA”

Informal supports were additionally utilized for psychosocial well-being, enhancing quality of life, and retaining a sense of normalcy. Samuel, who previously lived as an expat in Japan before becoming a military spouse, described the importance of reconnecting with his expat community: “Reconnecting with the folks that I had been friends with here before has been like a nice way to reactivate my community here, obviously within the [COVID] guidelines and all that, but it’s been an important touchstone for me. I worked for a Japanese company so like a lot of folks just lived here their whole lives, and then even the expat community that I created I would say, maybe a quarter of folks are still here in some capacity. And that’s been really nice as well. Obviously, most of them are up in the city, but even just being on the same time zone and like knowing that we’ll get to hang out at some point in the near future, has been awesome. SF”

The notion of reestablishing or maintaining familiar support systems was expressed by Cory, who stated: “So we were lucky, not all our family, but my dad and both moms, at different times, flew out after the baby was born. So, we had that kind of, just, still direct support. CL” Cory’s family received additional informal support from another couple after giving birth. Cory described, “There was a couple, the wife was at the Naval Hospital, and they were really supportive and became good friends of ours. In terms of specifics, it’s when the new baby was born and I wasn’t sleeping and there was just this kind of a black hole in my memory, but they would help and bring us food. CL” When asked how significant establishing support was, Alexander described how informal supports, in the form of playdates, helped his family’s functioning, “It was big because otherwise, I think both my wife and I would go crazy if the only people we
saw were each other and our kids. We do have other families that have kids our daughters ages, so we can do playdates within the [COVID] rules. That way we can get together and have adult conversations while the kids are playing, and also let the kids play with other people and different toys. And we can kind of take a step back of not having to necessarily be as involved with the kids because other kids are engaging them, and then we can kind of just watch them as we talk to other parents. AG”

Patrick described utilizing informal supports as a way to attenuate and preempt stressors from deployment separation and during moments of psychosocial stress. Patrick stated, “It actually took me a good eight or nine months before I found a group. I play cards and found a group to play cards with, and that was really my first like social branching out and I found them about the time my wife went on her first deployment and that was kind of intentional, I knew that was coming up so I like put more effort into finding people because even with being able to hang out with people virtually back in the states and play games with them, there’s still just something about sitting down with someone that gives you something extra socially. And even though these people that I play cards with aren’t my closest, you know, longtime friends, it still does a lot just kind of on a psychological level, I guess. PH” In this example, Patrick’s intentional efforts of increasing his social supports during his wife’s impending deployment demonstrates the combined use of Emotion, Problem, and Meaning Focused Coping. He utilized social supports as a coping strategy to mitigate anticipated stress from deployment separation. This is parallel to Lazarus and Folkman’s (1987) findings on coping strategies being used to manage the accompanying emotions of a threatening stress appraisal. During moments of psychosocial stress stemming from COVID restrictions, Patrick also described informal supports in an online community as helpful in mitigating stress. He commented, “Once I did find a job, I stopped pulling away from people that I knew in real life. I kind of took that skill set of interacting with people online and was able to use that once I was over here to stay in contact with my real-life friends from back home a lot better. And even now, I still have several friends that I game with at least once every two weeks. So, even through COVID, that has helped me immensely. PH”

Formal support is defined as support derived from networks that consist of military organizations, volunteer associations, civilian community-based resources, and military entitlements. All research
participants attended the mandatory AOB (Area Orientation Brief) and found it helpful to connect with other spouses and gather information on obtaining a drivers’ license and other cultural information. Joseph described AOB as helpful and commented, “AOB was where you know everybody who comes into Yokosuka, that’s in the military or a military dependent, have to go to like a five-day course, or class, for a week. They teach you about the culture, they teach you about what is proper, what’s not proper, what’s expected of you, why we’re considered ambassadors, the ramifications of if you do something wrong here, and how to get a drivers’ license. JA.” Ernest also described how AOB helped him bridge deeper social connections. He described, “AOB is when I got to finally got to link up with some people and go bowling. I didn’t start hanging out with black men until I went to AOB. ET”

Though most participants’ experiences with formal sponsors were inconsistent, being assigned a formal sponsor through their service member’s command proved useful for two participants. Alexander commented, “My wife’s sponsor at the hospital was great with getting her set up at the hospital, and then his wife and kids were great for me and the kids because while they getting work set up for her, she [sponsor’s wife] was able to help with, oh yeah, here’s the grocery stores. And so, like the first time she would sit shot gun so I could get used to driving on the roads. And then for other restaurants, we would carpool where I’d follow her car as he went around, showing like the different areas of the base of where the mini mart was, the gas station, here’s the depot, instead of having to figure things out on my own. AG” Barry also described the service member’s command assigning a sponsor to bring them groceries while in ROM (Restriction of Movement) during their initial two weeks on base. Barry stated, “Yeah, I think the sponsor was great with bringing us food consistently. That was super helpful. BH”

Five participants utilized formal supports primarily for employment and career mobility opportunities. Participants described attempts at developing networks of employment formally through the military or through their existing jobs. Alexander observed, “My wife had warned me ahead of time that she might get an overseas tour and I felt like, okay, it’ll be fun. And then as soon as she told me it was Yokosuka, I spoke to my boss, and my class, and my workmates, to see if they had any contacts of people I should reach out to, to either transfer work or look for another kind of work in that area. AG” Patrick
utilized military spousal preference, a formal support program for military spouses seeking employment through Federal or NAF (Non-Appropriated Funds). Patrick describes his experiences, “So, we arrived right in the middle of Trump’s inaugural hiring freeze. And that kind of threw a wrench into me getting hired on over here, and I really got to benefit from the spousal preference program. Whenever I was trying to get hired in Norfolk, I really didn’t understand how the program worked and missed out on the benefits of that because I didn’t know how to properly put in the application. But whenever we got here, I actually got it to work. And without that, it would have been several months after the freeze before I was able to get through the selection process. As soon as the hiring freeze was over, they were able to set a start date for me and I ended up getting started about three months after we got here, so much faster. PH” Three participants utilized formal supports for employment before their transition to secure employment.

Support Barriers are defined as obstacles that either impede or limit the utilization or access to resources. Participants provided a range of obstacles that limited their abilities to fully engage in social supports or support services. Two research participants described poor coordination regarding their respective commands providing a sponsor during their onboarding. Joseph stated, “You know it’s interesting, this is the first time I moved onto a military base, I believe we were supposed to have a sponsor. I never saw my sponsor, I never met my sponsor, nor did they ever reach out. JA” Another participant, Samuel, was unable to contact their command sponsor as well. Samuel stated, “Its [sponsor] been a missing piece, like, my partner had an official sponsor from his command and that was like kind of hit or miss, I think those things always are. And I had seen there was like a spouse support group, but I didn’t really join, I didn’t get involved in that front. I think a part of it was like, well you do the Navy stuff, but I know Japan, so we’ll be fine. Like, don’t worry and there is kind of a bigger gap that I didn’t really account, I would say. SF” Stress and Coping Theory describes the potentiality of environmental risks being shaped by the person’s perception of the experience and the social/cultural conditions of the environment (Lazarus and Folkman, 1987). In this example, Samuel’s initial primary appraisal was categorized as irrelevant (inconsequential to one’s well-being) due to his familiarity with Japan. However, his initial coping strategies were incongruous with his primary appraisal and situational conditions of the
environment. Samuel was experiencing his first OCONUS PCS during a pandemic, therefore, many of his expectations concerning his autonomy and familiarity of resources were disrupted by having to move on base and restrictions from travelling freely within Japan. His Problem-Focused coping strategies were ineffective as he had to reappraise his situation, given new information, and apply Emotion-Focused coping to manage his disappointment and unanticipated adjustment challenges to his new setting. Worth noting, both Samuel and Joseph were in same-sex marriages and on their first PCS. Both Samuel and Joseph described, during their interviews, a previous history of following their partners to different duty stations and establishing themselves in each location without the military’s assistance. This is largely attributed to same-sex marriage not being legalized and recognized by the military until 2015. Without the availability of specialty communities outside the military setting, support barriers were more salient. Samuel described, “Another community that we normally tap into whenever we moved to a place is the LGBT community, which is like wonderful because wherever you go, we’re there. So, it’s been something that’s usually important to us, but it’s been really harder here than I think it’s been in other places that we’ve been. SF”

Another support barrier that research participants with families noted was the absence of families that share the same PCS timeline and family makeup to establish congruent social supports for everyone in their family unit. Cory described, “We make friends mainly with Americans, its mostly military, and there’s the issue that everyone’s on different schedules so you make friends with people who are already established…and you meet them and then as soon as you’re friends with them they PCS. CL” Another participant, Alexander, commented, “If they don’t have kids, it’s a lot harder to get together with them. But if the other family has kids, then yeah, we can meet up and the kids can entertain each other, show off their areas of our house, or their house. And then the adults can passively kind of pay attention, make sure that they’re still talking without making a ruckus and then have adult conversations in the background. AG”

Two participants identified the lack of male representation in military social programs as barriers to engaging in supports. Patrick shared, “On the social side of things, because this base is a little smaller than Norfolk, more of the social opportunities, or at least what I see on like the Facebook base pages, a lot of the social spouse or self-organizing events have been aimed at families and mothers and women, and
there’s nothing wrong with that, but maybe in Norfolk, there wasn’t a need for that because there were just more guys around that I could hang out with that were outside the military association. PH” Nathan described social programs that centered exclusively around the military as a support barrier and hindrance to his engaging. Nathan stated, “I think it’s more of me not wanting to associate too much with the military, you know. If there was some type of support group that was off base...I’m just tired, you turn to your left, it’s the military. You turn to your right, it’s the military. I’m just tired of that. It’s like, you’re in a circle. It’s the same. That’s not my type of life. I’m used to exploring different stuff. NI” Additionally, Nathan explicitly identified the low number of male providers in Fleet & Family Support Center, at CFAY, as a barrier to utilizing counseling services. Nathan stated, “I didn’t contact the Fleet & Family because it’s the same run around. I’m really serious about it. The focus is on the women. You going to talk to someone at the Fleet Family Support, and you go there, what you see is a woman who is also a wife of active duty. Right? How would she understand what you’re going through as a man? How would she understand how you’re feeling? She will not understand. NI” In greater detail, Nathan shared the support barriers in engaging with social groups on base, “I think there are no males that are in these groups. It’s mostly women. I don’t know what I would discuss. I don’t know if a woman will understand what I’m going through as a man. I don’t know what to discuss with these wives. These are wives, other people’s wives. I don’t think I will have a connection with them because I try to look into the support groups that they do advertise. There is no group with a main focus on the male. NI” In Nathan’s case, the culminating stressors of adjusting to military culture paired with the absence of preferred supports are a glaring example of the incongruity of his environment in comparison to his needs. Edwards and Cooper (1990) describe situational conditions of fit between Person and Environment determining whether an appraisal is potentially stressful. Specifically, they describe strain increasing as the characteristics of the environment become incongruous from the characteristics of the person.

Joseph, a research participant with a service member spouse in senior leadership, described some social support barriers being imposed and maintained by military social norms. Joseph shared, “There is a common rule where you don’t inner mix with officers and enlisted people and so forth and so on. I was not
going to do that. Sorry, I’m not that type of person. I just don’t like that, but I understand the process. My husband can do that because he won’t intermingle with anybody that’s enlisted, because eventually he can be their boss. But I don’t feel like I should have been restricted to that because people are great, and everybody needs help. So, I have a well-rounded friend group of both enlisted and with officers. JA”

Another participant, Barry, described barriers with establishing social supports and using social media to mitigate the barriers. Barry commented, “I think we’re still going through that. We’ve only been here six months and so we’re trying to meet people and we’ve met people here and hung out with them in our building. But we’re still going through that process; I think it’s not easy for sure. I think social media makes it a little bit easier. We’ve seen people that live in our building in that FB group, and reached out to people on social media, but it’s a long process and not easy at all. BH”

Patrick and Barry described the barrier of programs being inaccessible to full time employees. Patrick stated, “I hold a full-time job. So, there are many things that are kind of scheduled in a way not conducive to having a job. All the medical places all have banking hours on main base. But it’s obviously aimed at, oh we just expect that your spouse is not the primary breadwinner and does not work and they can come in whenever is convenient for the military. There is no flexibility for accommodating any other schedule. PH” Barry shared the same sentiment regarding inflexible hours, “On the program side, I think the programs could be fine-tuned to be more conducive to full time work hours and that would do everything I could ever ask to help male spouses. BH”

In conclusion, participants cited the formal, mandatory Area Orientation Briefing/ Intercultural Relations (AOB/ICR) as beneficial to learning base policies and procedures in Yokosuka. Participants described meeting other families, learning cultural customs and Japanese etiquette for three days, and concluding the briefing with a field trip to Kamakura, Japan. Another beneficial formal support cited by a participant was the military spousal preference program aimed at prioritizing and expanding employment opportunities for military spouses on base. The customary command sponsors provided to incoming sailors and families were useful, when available. Of the eight research participants, three were provided with command sponsors who were able to help their families onboard to Yokosuka. Informal supports were
widely used and relevant for all research participants. Research participants described using informal supports for a range of needs, including transportation from their temporary accommodations to permanent housing, buying a car, meeting other people, childcare, information, and travel advice. These results align with the three purposes of support (Instrumental Aid, Informational Aid, and Socioemotional Aid) iterated by House (1981) and Turner (1983).

One participant described initiating informal social supports more in anticipation of his wife’s impending deployment and using social supports to attenuate deployment-related stress. Three participants described a preference for family friends with the same PCS schedule and family makeup so both his wife and children would have supports as well. One participant described difficulties with finding social support from other males who were stay-at-home dads. This participant voiced concerns about the lack of male representation in family programming, leading to underutilization of both formal and informal support programs. More specifically, the lack of male representation in Fleet & Family services, an umbrella organization of family support programs, including counseling, discouraged a research participant from pursuing counseling. All of these examples are parallel with literature describing sociocultural similarity influencing the effectiveness of social supports. Thoits (1986) described how social supports are most effective when individuals perceive social supports as socially similar and facing the same stressors. Other barriers to social support included social programming occurring primarily during business hours and being inaccessible for those working.

B. Stressfulness

To understand the prevalence and type of stressors male spouses experience during foreign relocations, research participants were asked to identify unforeseen or unexpected stressors during their onboarding and/or time in Yokosuka. Along with the stressfulness of foreign relocation, participants described COVID restrictions eliciting additional deleterious effects on individual and family functioning. The theme of Stressfulness emerged as research participants recalled moments and transitions during which their quality of life diminished and psycho-social stressors increased. The theme of Stressfulness is defined as any type of change that causes physical, emotional, or psychosocial strain, and/or tension. This theme is
further categorized into three subthemes of PCS (Permanent Change of Station) Stressors, Psychosocial Stressors, and Environmental Stressors though they may overlap.

**PCS Stressors** are defined as any stress that occurs as a result of relocating or acclimating to another duty station. Each research participant made connections to this particular theme and shared descriptive narratives centering around PCS Stress in the preparatory stages before the actual relocation occurred. When asked if there were processes or requirements that were unforeseen, participants pointed to the ancillary processes inherent to an overseas move within the military. Barry, a research participant who has experienced PCS moves before remarked, “The only thing that I can say is from my opinion, there seems like a lot of different paperwork and things that need to be figured out. It didn’t seem like a typical duty station that would be in the US. There’s so much stuff that goes into it when you’re moving internationally. BH” Another participant, Samuel, also expressed ambivalence concerning how to navigate the international PCS process. Samuel commented, “There was a lot of lack of knowledge. I was actually surprised by how little I did know going into this actually, like, I knew that they [Navy] helped with the move. But like, any details, I didn’t really know. My partner would kind of be the conduit and say, oh you need to get this specific type of passport. I didn’t know what quite all went into it and especially because of the uncertainty, but even just the logistics of how we were going to get here or booked on the Patriot express, a government charter flight. I didn’t really want to do that so like what are our options, and always having to go through him to get the information. SF” Ernest described the process as stressful and invoking anxiety largely due to the lack of military support and know-how despite their best efforts to be proactive. Ernest commented, “I learned that as important as it was for one to leave in as comfortable position as we could, that didn’t mean nothing to nobody else. That was solely on us, we’re in this together. Nobody really knows, not necessarily, the fear, the stress, the anxiety, or the pressures of it. They don’t really feel it. ET”

One participant, Patrick, highlighted the dynamic of when international PCS preparations run concurrent with a service member’s deployment. Patrick noted, “We had kind of an upheaval where we realized we didn’t have the right paperwork and we’re scrambling to find someone, anyone, who could help us get the right paperwork. And that was extremely stressful and there were a lot of moments like that.
But there were several along the way, over like six months leading up to our actual move, where there were things that we had missed because my wife had been underway, so I couldn’t receive any guidance from her and I had been working so I hadn’t had the time to fully devote to really researching what do we need or like who to get in contact with, or any of the other resources available on base. I had been busy with a job. PH”

Three participants highlighted the additional medical screenings and vaccinations that are administered during the preparatory stages of the PCS process as stressful. Participants described the invasive, precarious nature of being medically cleared in time for the PCS move. Cory commented, “There was like a holdup in getting the move scheduled because of one of the dependent approval forms, we submitted it and our move was blocked. It turns out we needed to do something, and we were basically stuck in limbo. We didn’t know and our clock almost ran out against the move schedule. It was a whole ordeal depending on the approval and getting all the medical clearances. CL” Nathan, a European national, was most unfamiliar with both the American military culture and the PCS process. Nathan found the overseas medical screening most uncomfortable and commented, “I never take no shots my whole life and I have to do these things. You have to go through medical screenings. All the screenings, the documentation, the questions that they ask literally just get into your life, your private life. The beginning was so hard. They treated me like I was a patient. I hate the word patient. Like, I’m not sick, I’m just here for the screening. I honestly started to feel sick. NF” Nathan described the lack of agency that he felt regarding the onboarding process. Samuel shared similar sentiments regarding the overseas screening process. He commented, “Like, the overseas screening and the amount of questions and history and kind of like, prying and stuff. I was like, I conceptually understand why they need to do it. But the actual process of going through it was very challenging for me because it’s very much like none of their business. SF”

Participants’ answers varied when asked about anticipatory hurdles or obstacles and strategies used to mitigate those hurdles. One participant, Cory, described how he would fly ahead to figure out housing during previous relocations but was unsuccessful in booking ahead for a Japan relocation. Alexander had previous PCS experience with his family, both as a military spouse and as a military child. He and his
spouse were used to having the support of grandparents during flights to help with the children but were unable to implement the same strategy during a foreign relocation. Alexander commented, “The biggest hurdle was the military way of not giving you plane tickets until like three days before you actually fly out. We were looking at potentially getting someone on the flight with us because we had two little ones, at the time one was nine months old and the other was two, but they came so late that it was too hard to get someone on the flight with us. AG”

Similar to Alexander’s experience, Ernest’s family received their flight tickets days before his spouse was scheduled to report to the command. Their schedule was further postponed due to inclement weather and delayed flights. Ernest recalled this situation as the most stressful part of their PCS process. Ernest shared, “It was summertime, but it was still delays and hurricane season and it wasn’t smooth. We get to Washington, but we had to stay in a hotel. We went to the USO in the airport and was hunkered up on sleeping bags and sleeping on the floor. It came to a point where she looked up and there were tears in her eyes. I think the tears came from the fact that we were supposed to be there [Yokosuka]. Don’t nobody want to be that person who didn’t get to your command on time. I don’t know exactly how it works but you could feel the intensity; she was like, we gotta get there. We gotta make these flights. We ended up on time, schedule wise, but those flights were postponed. It was so intense. I got to Japan and felt like I could sleep for days. ET”

The sub-theme of Psychosocial Stressors is defined as life situations that may contribute to the development or aggravation of mental disorders, diminished quality of life, or maladaptive behaviors. When research participants were prompted to discuss various aspects of their experiences concerning employment, adjustment to Japan, role flexibilities, deployment separation, support barriers, etc., responses revealed stressors that were potentially detrimental to participants’ well-being and quality of life. This research study aimed to identify and provide context around the precipitating factors that may have exacerbated participants’ psychosocial stress. Many participants described psychosocial stressors stemming from COVID restrictions that were enforced by CFAY, Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka, such as curfews, travel limitations, service disruptions (e.g. gym facilities, dental services), loss of childcare, and a
mandatory SIP (Shelter In Place) that occurred for approximately four months at the outset of the pandemic. Nathan described the restrictions as triggering and reminiscent of his authoritative upbringing. He commented, “Because of the rules, it’s like I’m being succumbed to this confinement, you know, and I’m being told what to do, when to go out, when to come back. I feel like a kid again. Because as a kid growing up, I grew up with my uncle and I had really bad experiences with control. My whole life as a kid growing up, I was controlled pretty much like a TV remote. And now that I feel it again, honestly, I do cry about it because I have to. My wife didn’t understand initially why I was so upset. The fact that I could not have an opinion of my own pissed me off more. NI” The loss of agency and independence was difficult for Nathan to manage in addition to COVID restrictions. Samuel expressed the same sentiments reflecting a loss of agency and independence. He responded, “There’s like an agency that has some control or like so much influence over someone. I hate it. And so that’s been really challenging because I’m also like a very independent person. I understand the importance of the restrictions but they’re a bit heavy handed. SF” Both Samuel and Nathan’s perspectives are parallel with findings of Stress & Coping Theory that suggests Emotion-Focused Coping is a more effective coping style when situations warrant short term adaptations or when appraisals trigger intense emotional strain.

All research participants with children, except one, were employed and forced to balance employee, spouse, father, and caregiver roles. Each participant described psychosocial stressors within each role and their attempts to mitigate them. Cory described the stress from being the primary caregiver and having to stay home with the children. He commented, “I wasn’t working. I stopped working when we left San Diego, and then I was with Sara [oldest daughter] when she was born. I was kind of thinking of doing a year with Claire [younger daughter] and by February, I was already kind of going crazy watching the kids. I think spending time with my kids is most important. But to actually spend day in and day out with two of them, even when there was just one, I started feeling crazy and started talking to myself. After a year, I was begging to be put back in the office.” Similarly, Nathan was relegated to the role of primary caregiver of two toddlers due to his wife’s deployment status and base childcare services being prioritized only for dual military couples. Nathan commented, “I was trying to adjust to being a single dad. That’s how I felt with
two toddlers. I’m married, but I feel that I’m not married at the same time. By myself, I can’t have friends. I don’t have a routine where I hang out with my friends. I don’t have my normal. I don’t have this support. I don’t have this or that. So, I’m trying to adjust to these things. So, I started going towards a depression and I did not even know it. Like I said before, I’m thinking I’m being a strong man, but I was slowly dying inside. NI”

For some research participants, the harsh realities of their expectations concerning housing options and securing employment posed significant difficulties to their psychosocial functioning. Ernest identified moments of stress and depression as he waited for his on base employment to resume. He described previous employment experience with services available on all Naval bases and was disappointed when his employment continuity was disrupted in Yokosuka. Ernest stated, “I had those ups and downs, those depressing moments, and when she [wife] came home I was defeated somewhat because I hadn’t heard from these jobs and it wasn’t like Florida with, by the time she came back, I had worked two to three different jobs moving around, just kind of choosing how and where I wanted to be, but the quality of life for me, it changed. ET” Samuel, having previously lived in Japan, was preparing to live in the local Japanese community. With COVID restrictions in place, all incoming families were assigned on-base housing as a cautionary effort to avoid additional spread. Samuel learned of this change while preparing to live off base. He commented, “The housing has really been detrimental to our quality of life. And that was a big expectation versus reality piece for me, because before Corona, it was basically you could choose. And we’re a family of two, it’s just my partner and I, we don’t have children. And so, for us, we are much more likely to do our own thing. We came to be in Japan and then we get kind of put into the housing on base, and that has been a huge element. But the curfew and stuff has been hugely detrimental to our quality of life. Mine especially spending significantly more time here [in the home].”

Environmental Stressors are defined as stressors that occur as a result of changes within the immediate environment. COVID restrictions are coded as Environmental Stressors. Each research participant shared the stress of managing COVID restrictions, which gave relevance to this subtheme and its emphasis. The challenge of integrating this particular subtheme was that some stressors occurred as a
direct result of the environmental stress caused by COVID restrictions, while those same stressors also impaired psychosocial functioning. Consequently, some responses may have overlap between *Psychosocial Stressors* and *Environmental Stressors*.

All families at CFAY experienced a Shelter in Place decree (SIP), during which all families were banished to their respective housing in Japan for four months, and families could leave their home only for essential activities like grocery shopping and medical appointments. All families experienced limitations where travel was restricted to 3kms outside of the installation or 3kms within their home of record if living in off-base housing. The use of public transportation and the base shuttle was limited. Commonly used services such as gyms, playgrounds, youth sports, counseling services, salons, restaurants, libraries, dry-cleaning, Chapel services, etc., were cancelled or, when possible, provided virtually. Basic essential services such as the Commissary, Navy Exchange stores, base schools, base USOs (primarily used by single sailors), liberty centers, and restaurants were cancelled, understaffed, or limited to a small number of patrons at a time. Additionally, incoming families and single sailors experienced a mandatory Restriction of Movement (ROM), which meant they were transported from the airport to a room, in confinement, for two weeks minimum.

Though each participant was affected by COVID restrictions on a common level, some experienced more acute responses because of how the restrictions affected their particular family. For example, four of the research participants have children. Due to COVID restrictions, child development centers (CDC) were restricted to only mission essential personnel, restricting services to only dual-service families (both parents are service members). Of the four families with children, only one research participant is unemployed. This meant that three research participants, with children, were forced to manage both childcare and employment responsibilities. Cory remarked, “*We feel cooped up because of COVID. I tried to start working and then COVID held it up because I didn’t have childcare because of our status. There’s a lot of stress about it because of all the annoying restrictions.* CL” Alexander shared the similar experience of COVID restrictions impacting childcare and employment, “*So we lost childcare for a while but then it*
came back. It became my wife working during the day, because she couldn’t telework and then I’d watch the kids. Then I would do my work late at night. AG”

An unexpected caveat in this sub-theme were the research participants whose spouses were attached to larger commands in the pre-deployment stages. Research participants described the compounded restrictions of both CFAY and individual command restrictions as stressful to manage. Some responses may have overlap between *Psychosocial Stressors* and *Environmental*. For both Nathan and Ernest, in particular, their spouse’s pre-deployment stage was characterized by an incremental Restriction of Movement where service members were individually confined to a room locally in Yokosuka and adjoining installations during the weeks preceding their deployment. During this time, families were separated much sooner than anticipated due to the Navy’s efforts to reduce exposure for those deploying soon. Nathan described this, “The pandemic hits, and now you’re restricted. I felt like a prisoner, and I still do. We were on this restriction for the whole year and then she [wife] went into ROM (Restriction of Movement) for 15 days, two times. I’m like minutes away from her and I cannot see her at all. But I could see the building where she was. I would go by and leave toiletries, food, and clothing outside of the door of the building. She was able to FaceTime, but the kids could not understand. They ask Daddy why Mommy is crying. That time was pretty hard for us. NI”

The restriction of travelling due to COVID limitations was stressful for most research participants per their responses. The inability to maintain the same activity level proved stressful for all participants and their families. Barry stated, “Like COVID’s been the biggest thing, the biggest stressor. Especially moving to Japan. We were most excited about traveling around Japan and then, like how variable it is. You don’t know where you can go and the rules around that are always updated every week. And so if you make plans around going somewhere on the weekend, it can change. We’ve had to cancel plans several times. BH”

When asked the similar question of unforeseen or unexpected stressors, Joseph responded, “COVID has been an extremely big barrier to my quality of life. I mean, I haven’t been able to do the things that I really want to do that are pleasurable, like going to travel and so forth. JA”
In sum, research participants described stress occurring from the preparation phase of the PCS process, psychosocial stressors from imposed role flexibilities, military culture, deployment separation, loss of childcare, COVID restrictions, and loss of employment, etc. These stressors were further categorized into subthemes of PCS Stressors, Psychosocial Stressors, and Environmental Stressors. Participants described feeling helpless as they tried navigating the transition to an international installation and cited the lack of knowledge, additional paperwork, and absence of military support as most stressful. Some participants recalled receiving travel accommodations within days of their arrival date to Yokosuka. One participant described the stressfulness of flight delays and the anticipatory consequences of arriving late to a parent command. Other participants described experiencing stress from the invasive processes of mandatory medical screenings and vaccinations that were necessary before arriving in Japan. Participants with previous PCS experiences described the transition to an overseas installation as more cumbersome than a domestic PCS in the United States. The policies that were developed and implemented by CFAY Yokosuka, in response to the Coronavirus, were another source of stress for participants and categorized as Environmental Stress. One participant, who had previously lived in Japan, experienced stress from having to choose on-base housing due to the pandemic.

Participants whose spouses were preparing to deploy had to endure additional restrictions, as a family, to ensure that deployed sailors tested negative for Coronavirus before their ship’s departure. Participants who arrived after the pandemic began were forced to ROM (Restriction of Movement) in a room for two weeks minimum and were prohibited from leaving their hotel room. Other participants described the inability to travel, access the gym, curfew limits, SIP (Shelter in Place), and restricted use of public transportation as stressful to their overall quality of life and well-being. Overall, research participants described stressors stemming from the obstacles they encountered in managing their everyday needs. Lazarus and Folkman (1987) describe these stressors as daily hassles and explain the type of hassles encountered as determining one’s vulnerability to stress. Lazarus and Folkman (1987) categorize daily hassles as either central (ongoing, sometimes troubling, personal themes and conflicts) or peripheral hassles (vicissitudes of the moment that come and go as part of the moment, e.g., traffic jams, weather),
and posit that central hassles have more influence on psychological symptoms and physical health. Findings suggest that central hassles are a better predictor of “concurrent and subsequent psychological symptoms than were life events” (p. 149). Additionally, central hassles seemingly reflect a deficit in coping skills, unmet personal needs, and ongoing personal agendas.

C. Employment

Research participants were asked about their employment experiences before relocation and their experiences with obtaining employment in Japan. Participants were asked about the significance of employment and perceived barriers to securing employment. The collective responses indicated employment as a theme relevant to all research participants but a dichotomy between those whose efforts were successful in gaining employment and those who were not. The emerging theme of Employment is conceptualized as the engagement of a person in some occupation, business, trade, or profession for which they are paid. As participants discussed their experiences concerning the theme of employment, subthemes of Employment Experiences & Mobility, Beliefs about Employment & Its Significance, and Employment Barriers were repeatedly discussed. Much of each participant’s adjustment centered around their success in finding relevant employment congruent to their particular skillset and experiences.

Employment Experiences & Mobility is defined as a person’s work journey before, during, and after foreign relocation. Of the five employed research participants, three were able to transfer their jobs to Japan, and one transferred his job to Yokosuka using military spousal preference benefits. Participants represented a range of previous employment experiences in industries such as technology, landscaping, nursing, software engineering, data analysis, computer science programming, Navel engineering, and entertainment. When asked to describe the preparations made for the upcoming transition overseas, all research participants described the continuity of employment as essential and integral in the early preparation phase. Patrick and Ernest discussed having previous employment connected to the Navy and utilizing those jobs to leverage employment opportunities in Yokosuka. Patrick described unsuccessful efforts with securing employment at their previous duty station and its effects on his functioning. He remarked, “In Norfolk, I went about 10 months without getting a job and it was a massive depressing
downward spiral. It sucked! I withdrew from everyone and everything I enjoyed. PH” This catalyzed his efforts in securing employment in Yokosuka using military spousal preference and influenced his family’s selection of Yokosuka. Patrick described his process, “We targeted here because we knew there was a very specific way that I could get a job. I had already talked with the head of the organization that was going to be hiring me here. I basically had a good ole boy connection hook up. Even though I was able to take advantage of the program, I have no idea how well things would have worked for me if we hadn’t chosen to come here, and I hadn’t already had things set up. PH” Joseph, a nurse, described reaching out to healthcare professionals in Japan to learn of upcoming employment opportunities. He remarked, “You know, I knew ahead of time that employment would be difficult. I was a part of a group chat in Yokosuka, and it was a discussion around the possibilities. JA”

After Alexander learned Yokosuka was their next duty station, he subsequently went to his office and requested a transfer to Japan. He remarked, “I just went to my office because I knew they had people that worked in Japan. I tried to get in touch with the people out here to either transfer or make contact with others. AG” Barry shared similar circumstances of transferring his job location and stated, “Luckily, I was able to transfer with my company because they have a headquarters in Tokyo. And so that was kind of a big deal that took a lot of time and effort on the job to try and figure out how that would work. But thankfully that all worked. BH” One participant, Nathan, previously resided in Europe and owned a nightclub before relocating to Japan. He expressed difficulties with transferring his business to Japan and consulted a Japanese attorney for guidance. Ernest owned a landscaping business, worked for MWR (Morale, Welfare, and Recreation) in Florida, and had experiences with working onboard ships in their previous duty station. Though he had previous experiences with working with Naval organizations, he described his previous efforts being fruitless once relocating to Yokosuka. Ernest described his experiences, “I got a MWR job and thought that will help and maybe give me some pull or some kind of leeway wherever we go, because there’s a MWR everywhere. I thought having that relationship with MWR would give me a leg up. I felt the conversation, in the interviews, would have been different, because it’s like, what are you familiar with? Okay, we do this over here, but did y’all do this back in the states? But for me to come over here and they
look at me like... we got plenty of candidates. I’m like, you got plenty of candidates but how many of them worked in this facility. That was as much as I tried to prepare. It didn’t feel like I did enough. I don’t think that there’s too much preparation you can do, especially for Yokosuka. ET” Cory, a software engineer, had worked intermittently for the past two years as he split his career with being the primary caregiver of his children. Cory recently returned to work and described his employment experiences as, “I started working for a Japanese company. It’s a joint venture of a Japanese company and an American company I used to work for. I was thinking, oh this way I can be immersed in Japan, working with people in the same time zone but also still like I can contribute usefully. I’m super fortunate in terms of the career I have. I’m able to do things like that. CL”

Beliefs about Employment & Its Significance is defined as the outlook and convictions that inherently guide an individual’s efforts and motivations to work. The researcher asked participants about the significance of employment in Yokosuka, their experiences with seeking employment, and previous employment experiences. As participants and the researcher dialogued, participants described inherent beliefs about work and its utility in their feeling productive, identity, and its buffering effects on stress. Participants described multiples benefits of employment including the pay, a deeper connection to Japanese culture, and retaining normalcy. Alexander mirrored these sentiments in his response, “Well, that [securing employment] was a big deal because I think I would probably go insane with the amount of time that you have sitting in the house or going around with the kids all the time. I would enjoy it, but I don’t think I could do three years straight of that. AG” Barry responded similarly about the significance of employment, “It [securing employment] was a pretty big deal I think for me. I’m the type of person that likes to stay busy, if I don’t have something to do, I’m gonna figure it out and find something to do. Having a job is just necessary for me to stay busy. BH”

For one research participant, securing employment was relevant in the preparatory stage but became secondary to his full-time MSW program and internship. Joseph commented, “My husband could have taken another position in the US or come to Japan. Since we don’t have any debt, or school debt, car debt, or so forth, it gave me a chance to be free of not to work and also I was trying to finish up my MSW
program. JA” Similarly, Samuel experienced a gap in employment after relocating to Japan and chose to fill the gap with intensive, Japanese language courses and managing his AirBnB. Samuel commented, “The employment gap has been really challenging just because I like to keep busy. And I have things that I work on, like the language course is not a job but it is something like you’re working towards with a sense of goal in mind. We have an AirBnB at home that I manage and stuff which is wonderful. It’s been a great project. SF” Both Samuel and Joseph’s sentiments are in line with the latent benefits of employment described in the Trewick et al. (2018) study, which found that nonworking spouses were more satisfied if deeply involved with one or more nonpaying activities.

With Nathan being a small business owner from Europe, his employment experiences were far more aligned with entrepreneurial endeavors. He was most inflexible to engaging in industries separate from his previous experiences or working as an employee. Nathan remarked, “No offense to anybody. I had my own business in Italy, so I don’t believe in working for anybody. It’s just my whole family. We have this entrepreneurship mindset and create our own lane for other people to work in it. NI” Ernest shared strong beliefs about working as integral to manhood. Ernest’s beliefs about work were aligned with spiritual beliefs and biblical references. Additionally, he described the military’s influence perpetuating a complacency among military spouses that inadvertently discouraged work. Ernest remarked, “They [military] ain’t knocking on these spouses’ doors trying to get them to work, and they’re very comfortable not working because they set it up like this. You ain’t paying electricity, rent, or water so the least you can do is stay at home. This is how you serve your country, right? You want me to go crazy though? What the military wants for me and my family ain’t what I want for me and mine. I feel like the traditional ways work. And in the Bible it says a man must work. What does that mean specifically? I feel like my relationship and my understanding of manhood is you gotta get up every day with the intent to give your family the best that you got. That sounds like work to me. It’s not necessarily go punch a clock. It could mean cut your grass, take out your trash, or clean your house. ET”

Employment Barriers are obstacles that impede or limit access to gaining employment. When research participants were asked what they perceived as barriers to obtaining employment, responses
centered around the availability of jobs, SOFA (Status of Forces Agreement) restrictions, career inflexibility, industries with career mobility, formal support limitations, and competition with other military spouses and Japanese nationals. Two research participants, Ernest and Joseph, highlighted the amount of jobs at CFAY, designated for Japanese nationals and the limitations this creates. Specifically, when asked about employment barriers, Ernest responded, “The lack of availability. As much as you think there are jobs, by the time the Japanese civilians come in and take up the majority of the jobs, it becomes necessary that you speak both languages. ET” Joseph made similar observations and responded, “Because the Japanese are contracted here on the military installation, they only have so many jobs available. So Americans are in competition with them as well. JA”

Ernest and Samuel made similar observations regarding the limitations of formal supports available to help spouses secure employment. Though Patrick successfully utilized military spousal preference benefits, Ernest and Samuel were unsuccessful in their attempts to utilize the same support. Ernest described his experiences, “They gassed me up because they said I’m a civilian spouse, so I’m at the top of the ladder...it’s a lot of top of the ladders. It’s a lot of A-1 prospective people trying to get these jobs. That’s why it takes you two to three months to hear back from somebody. ET” Samuel described the military spousal preference program as good in theory, but maybe not as reliable as it intends. Samuel responded, “My understanding is that it’s a pretty light preference in the selection process. Going through the experience of trying to do the USA Jobs and stuff, it’s really hard transitioning too because I’ve always been in the private sector. It’s really like a whole different resume and style of applying. There’s a lot of friction to entry. SF”

With the installation being the primary hub for employment, fewer participants attempted to explore employment opportunities within Japan. The research participants who sought employment opportunities in Japan found a larger barrier tied to their residency status. SOFA (Status of Forces Agreement) is an agreement between the military and host country that allows military service members and their command-sponsored family members to reside in the host country, bypassing Visa and reentry restrictions for the period identified on their military orders. Participants found that SOFA Status incurred a different taxation
structure than regular expatriates and additional guidelines for employment. Nathan consulted a Japanese attorney and found that aspirations to start a nightclub in Japan winnowed because of his SOFA status. Nathan responded, “They said if I came to Japan on my own, and not affiliated with the military or CFAY, me getting a job or starting a business would have been way easier. I learned that once you are affiliated with CFAY, the Japanese government has different rules to that. NI” Cory, a software engineer, identified the barrier of SOFA status as well. When asked the same question of perceived barriers, Cory responded, “One thing I wouldn’t have known is my legal status for work. It seems like a kind of gray area with the whole Status of Forces Agreement. For me, I work for a joint venture company in Japan, and it’s a Japanese company, but they have an arrangement where they actually contract for my services with the corporation in the US. I’m paid as a contractor by the cooperation, which means I skip all the legal stuff. CL.” Samuel responded similarly and highlighted the lack of information readily available for those seeking employment in Japan. He noted, “I’ve been really surprised by how little support there’s been from the base in terms of navigating employment for spouses. Especially because we occupy a strange visa status where we can work but we need the base’s permission, and we’re taxed differently, and there’s just so much nuance in that and the amount of work that I’ve tried to drill into those answers, it has been challenging. SF”

Research participants described a significant barrier of certain industries not being as transferable to international work and unwillingness to crossover to different sectors. Samuel’s narrative reflected this sentiment as he narrated his experiences with engaging formal supports like Fleet & Family. Samuel described, “It was a little hard to walk into Fleet & Family and say, hey I speak the language to an extent, and I have eight years of experience in tech. Do you have connections with companies like these? The reply was kind of like, well, you should sign up to be a substitute teacher, which is a lovely sentiment but not in terms of my own sense of career. SF” Alexander’s response was similar in describing the ability to transfer within certain industries. He responded, “There are fewer jobs and they’re also more particular of what kind of work there is out here. I know a lot of other husbands that I’ve talked to, they’ve never done anything with military or the government. They’re always in the private sector. And then they come over
here and there’s not really any private sector work for them. So for them, I know it’s a much bigger shell shock of what kind of work there is, as well as the timelines to interview and get hired. AG” Barry highlighted the discrepancy between industries as well. He remarked, “I guess it depends on what the person wants to do. I started doing my own research and it definitely seems difficult and I guess it depends on the industry too. I was looking at it from a data science data analytics perspective, I think it would have been easier for me than say someone who was trying to do finance. Some other industries are a little less in demand. BH”

Overall, the theme of Employment revealed perspectives concerning beliefs about employment, employment barriers, and current/previous employment experiences. Participants’ careers ranged from nursing, software engineering, landscaping, data analysis, computer science, Navy engineering systems, and entertainment. Research participants’ adjustment and attitudes about CFAY Yokosuka and the Navy were largely influenced by their employment experiences and work status. Each participant described preparations made to continue employment in Yokosuka. Five participants were employed, one participant was currently seeking employment, and another participant only wanted to pursue self-employment opportunities in Japan. Three participants were able to transfer their jobs before they transitioned to Yokosuka; another participant used the military spousal preference program. Though one participant, Ernest, worked on base at his previous duty station, he could not transfer his job to Yokosuka. Ernest had to reapply for positions within the same organization once he arrived in Yokosuka.

Each participant expressed employment as integral to their identity, productivity, and necessary for psychological well-being. Patrick described being motivated to secure employment in Yokosuka due to his experiencing depression after being temporarily unemployed in their previous duty station. Some stressors are anticipated due to previous experiences of distress. Broadly known as future-oriented coping, Reuter and Schwarzer (2012) proposed four types of coping being reactive (dealing with a stressful appraisal that is ongoing or has already been experienced), anticipatory (efforts to deal with imminent threats that are certain to occur), preventive (efforts to build up resources for less strain in the future or the onset of a stressful event), and proactive (building resources for future challenges and goals). In Patrick’s example,
his efforts to proactively secure employment and avoid reexperiencing depression are examples of all four future-oriented coping styles. More specifically, when learning of his upcoming transition from Norfolk to Yokosuka, Patrick immediately sought employment opportunities to prevent his previous experience of unemployment when relocating to Norfolk. Patrick actively sought support and utilized formal supports such as military spousal preference to continue his current employment in Japan. In anticipation of his upcoming PCS from Norfolk, he contacted the corresponding employer in Japan to learn of openings and coordinated this with his outgoing employer to facilitate the transition. Patrick correlated employment with a productive quality of life and discussed, in detail, how the absence of employment led to a downward spiral of depression during which he isolated himself from friends. He discussed cultivating supports and widening his community in Japan as a preventive measure to maintain his quality of life and to manage the emotional, deployment-related difficulties. Other participants described psychosocial stress from being unemployed during this study. Another participant, Samuel, detailed activities such as managing their stateside AirBnB and attending daily Japanese language courses to stay productive while he located employment outside the installation. For each research participant, obtaining employment in their respective careers and industries was significant. Participants identified multiple employment barriers at CFAY, including the limited number of jobs and certain jobs being designated for Japanese citizens. Nathan, a former nightclub owner from Italy, preferred self-employment opportunities and consulted with attorneys to continue in his industry. Much like Samuel, Nathan found an additional employment barrier being affiliated with the military and having SOFA (Status of Forces Agreement) status which limited the type of off-base jobs and self-employment opportunities military spouses can have.

D. Male Spouse Perspective

Research participants were asked if they perceive their experiences as different than female spouses and, if so, in what specific ways. The dialogue around this question provides context into how male spouses viewed themselves in the military environment and the perceived parameters that guide their interactions. The theme of Male Military Spouse Perspective is defined as the mental view of a subject, or its related parts, that gives context or understanding to the male identity within the military milieu. This
theme is further broken down into three subthemes: *Parameters, Perceived Differences, and Injured Masculinity*. This primary theme encapsulates the microaggressions that male spouses experience, the gaps in how male spouses perceive themselves versus how they are perceived in the military environment, and specific environmental processes that challenge their masculinity.

The subtheme *Parameters* is defined as a limitation or boundary, explicit or inferred, that guides male spouses’ actions or attitudes in the military environment. This particular subtheme was more relevant among research participants who assumed most of the childcare responsibilities and were home during the daytime. They noted that playgrounds and other child-focused activities were mostly intersected with mothers. They described the boundaries that are inherent between the cohort of male and female spouses. Cory narrated this in his response, “And so you’re at home on base and most of the other people at home are wives of military members, so you’re kind of hanging out with them a little but you don’t. Usually you make friendships as a couple, but you don’t actually. It’s almost inappropriate but you’re not like going out to the playground and meeting moms, hanging out, or going out for drinks with them.” Ernest shared this sentiment and provided insight into the normative pretenses of friendships in the military environment. He shared, “I’m seeing families miss out on opportunities of having real friends, because they’re only going off of the friendships they’ve had before…which are not typically with married men. ET” Ernest shared how attempts in building rapport or engaging families for playdates can quickly be misinterpreted. He shared, “I’ve been told one time, I feel that we don’t need to be in the same room, or in communication, until my husband comes back. I have to accept it, bite my tongue, and know the awkwardness is not my fault. ET” Ernest described subsequently exercising more caution to avoid his actions being mislabeled. Ernest stated, “I don’t want to be the creep and they’ll turn you into the creeper in a heartbeat on base. ET”

The subtheme of *Perceived Differences* connotes how males interpret their experiences differently from female spouses and the challenges this creates. This subtheme emerged during various segments in the interviews particularly when discussing the significance of employment, social support barriers, and unexpected stressors. Research participants dialogued on how perceptions of male spouses challenge social norms and distance them naturally from male service members. Cory described this as, “If you’re a
military wife with kids that’s totally understood socially. If you’re a man, people are wondering what you’re doing, and I don’t think people are too mean about it or trying to be disapproving. I think there is still a kind of raised eyebrow element to it. Back when we were in 29 Palms with Marines, it was all guys blowing up stuff, tanks, and helicopters, a real macho environment. I’m there like, yeah, I got a baby with bottles and diaper changes. CL” Ernest shared a perceived difference between male and female spouses being the social acceptance of the female focusing on the family primarily through a caregiving capacity. He described, “A dependent spouse’s family will be alright if she keeps choosing to be there for her and her child. My family can’t be alright if I just strictly focus on myself and my child. I got to focus on her [wife] despite the fact that she’s rarely here. When she comes in the house, she has to feel like the roses are pulled out, the balloons, like it’s a parade. ET”

Both Samuel and Cory described the ambivalence of occupying a role that female spouses have predominately occupied. Samuel stated, “There is a real sense of trying to figure out how to occupy a role that I think historically has been more the traditional family unit. We’re both untraditional with being a male spouse as well as a same sex family in a community that wouldn’t have been thinkable a decade ago. It’s interesting to chart somewhat new territory in an organization that is still a bit more outmoded. SM” Cory shared the same sentiment, “For me, as a male military spouse, specifically a civilian military spouse, there’s less of a carved out understood identity, which is fine. I think I’ve got a strong enough sense of identity, but I’ve still got all my insecurities. CL”

Other research participants described how they are often presumed to be the service member. Alexander described this occurring during their onboarding. He stated, “I think the perceptions are different, because I know a lot of times when we would show up, when we first landed at Yokota, they asked me for my ID card even though I have a beard and everything, so I clearly wasn’t the military person. They kept talking to me and I would tell them you need to talk to my wife. AG” Patrick shared how his being presumed to be the service member led to a disruption in processing their paperwork. He described, “It’s definitely unique being a male spouse, I think oftentimes we have interactions through the military that people assume that I’m the active duty. And I have to correct them, like, no I’m not in the military. Another
thing that came out of that was whenever we were going through the overseas screening process our paperwork got messed up twice because multiple people confused us on the paperwork and thought that just because I was a man that I was active duty. I spent an additional day of leave in order to fix the paperwork problems. PH”

The subtheme of *Injured Masculinity* is defined as the gap between how male military spouses feel about themselves, how they are perceived in the military community and the microaggressions that occur. Research participants described how the phrases “stay at home dad” or “dependent” challenged their masculinity and how funneling communication through their service member spouse felt. Eric describes, “I could not get my son in daycare and nine times out of 10 just for the simple fact that they wanted her [wife] approval over mine. Over here I learned what a dependent is. It’s not a fair term, I’m a grown [expletive] man. I’m not a dependent. ET” Nathan described difficulty with being labeled a stay-at-home dad. He described, “As an African, I’m a man of pride. I’m not comfortable with this. Don’t think that I’m comfortable with just being a stay at home...I don’t even like how that sounds. I hate that word. Stay at home. That pisses me off. I’m not a stay-at-home dad or a stay-at-home husband. This is very important as a man; I don’t want to feel worthless. Being a military spouse is like the roles have been reversed. Your wife is now the man, and you are now the woman. You’re home and she goes to work. She brings the kids to you all the time and you go grocery shopping. NI”

Ernest and Samuel described how the disruption in employment challenged their identity as a male. Samuel described, “I spend a lot of time, not only struggling with the lack of employment and all things we’ve talked about but the pressure from your peers, friends, and family because it feels like occupying more of a traditionally female role and having a lot of sensitivities around that. SF” Ernest described the gap in employment as injurious to his male identity as he was unable to provide financially. He commented, “The baby’s attached to your hip and most fathers don’t get to experience that. So I had to learn how blessed I was. I have a father and whereas other males would say you’re not making any money, you don’t have a job, she’s gonna leave you, you have to provide and get a good job. My father was like, aye bruh, I know you’re talking about trying to find work, but your son needs you right now. If your son is
okay, you’re okay. My father drilled that into me. ET” Ernest, like Samuel, shared the internalized pressures of contributing financially. Ernest stated, “Everybody’s just looking at you like, oh he’ll be alright. I’m like no, I will not be okay not contributing to society and not contributing to my household. ET” In both examples, Samuel and Ernest appraised the demands of their social situations as stressful due to the unfamiliarity and inflexibility of their roles. Lazarus (1991) describes certain properties of demands, within the social environment, as likelier to induce a stress/threat appraisal. Situations that are novel, ambiguous, unexpected, and constrained by time are likely to produce more stress for the individual.

Cory described experiencing microaggressions in previous duty stations and here in Japan. He described his experiences, “When we were in 29 Palms, we had the first baby. There was a lot of ‘Mr. Mom’, and I get that actually with Japanese moms when I show up at the bus stop for the preschool or at the school events. It’s all Japanese moms and they’re laughing that there’s a guy coming to pick up their kid from preschool reactions. I’m not sure if it’s as strong but here in Japan, it doesn’t strike at my sense of identity because its Japan and they’re doing their own thing. In the US actually, I felt weird pressure to conform. People would occasionally make comments about me being unemployed which I think I would keep it all inside my head, but I would be unreasonably sensitive to what they were saying. I know I’ve earned plenty of money. Trying to justify myself for no reason except I was primed to think that what they were saying was a really important signal about what I should be doing in my life. CL”

In summary, the theme of Male Spouse Perspectives was further categorized into three subthemes of Parameters, Perceived Differences, and Injured Masculinity. Participants recounted their experiences as a male military spouse in a role where social relationships and norms are largely influenced and established by female military spouses. For example, participants with children described parameters or implicit boundaries that they faced when attempting to establish play dates or socialize with other parents. One participant recalled moments when he had to be more diligent in approaching conversations with other spouses to avoid his actions being mischaracterized. The subtheme of Perceived Differences explained the differences in perceptions when the male spouse is the primary caregiver or the “stay at home” dad. One participant, Cory, discussed the reactions from other Japanese spouses when picking his child up from
preschool and condescending remarks made by male service members in their previous duty station, such as “Mr. Mom.” Other participants experienced injuries to their masculinity when referred to as a “dependent,” being unable to contribute financially to the household during employment disruptions, and assuming childcare and more homemaking duties, like cooking, cleaning, and grocery shopping.

E. Adjustment

In previous literature concerning expatriate or cross-cultural adjustment, research suggested that the ease or comfort with which people were willing to engage in the local culture and interact with local hosts would largely determine one’s sense of adjustment. (Black et al. 1991; Haslberger et al., 2013). Utilizing this concept, the researcher developed questions in the interview guide to elicit participants’ experiences while residing in Japan and their comfort with immersing in the local culture. The theme of Adjustment is defined as “the degree of perceived psychological comfort within a new environment or specific facet of one’s life abroad” (Black et al. 1991, p. 499). The researcher utilized Black’s (1991) definition to highlight the dynamics of adjustment being a perceptual concept and highly idiosyncratic. The theme of Adjustment is further categorized into four subthemes: Joint Decision Making, Relationship with Local Hosts & Japanese Culture, Risk Factors vs. Protective Factors, and Safety.

Previous literature describes the process of joint decision-making during an international relocation as key to expatriate spouses’ retaining a sense of control, agency, and mutuality (Blakely et al., 2014). The researcher developed questions that described concerns or excitement about this upcoming transition to elicit responses around the discourse between participants and their spouses. Research participants described the Joint Decision-Making that gave shape to their experiences thus far. Cory described the joint preparations and discussions that he and his wife had, “We looked into Yokosuka and saw that this was not in the middle of Tokyo. There’s actually oceans and hills and stuff around that got us more excited. I felt very lucky because this was something we were sort of mentally preparing for. We knew where I’d be in my career and had made the decision together that I would go to part time or remote for the flexibility for childcare. CL” Barry described the joint decisions of choosing either Okinawa or Yokosuka but ultimately choosing the location that worked from a career standpoint. Barry described, “We felt that it would be best
for me, from a work standpoint, but then also being closer to Tokyo, we felt that we would have more access to similar things we had in Washington. BH” Samuel described the joint decision making in choosing Japan. Samuel commented, “We knew that moving abroad would be part of his career path, and we really wanted to take destiny into our hands and so we actually chose to come to Yokosuka because I had actually previously lived in Tokyo before I even knew him. So even though we’re moving abroad, it’ll be a place that’s familiar to me. SF”

The subtheme of Relationship with Local Hosts & Japanese Culture depicts the degree of comfort and appreciation with embracing and interacting with the environment, social norms, and social relationships within one’s new environment. Research participants were asked to compare their quality of life before relocation to their current quality of life. The researcher asked participants what specific cultural factors have made their adjustment easy or difficult. Additionally, the researcher asked the participants to describe their experiences with local host nationals. All participants described an appreciation of residing in Japan and experiencing certain cultural qualities. Certain qualities of Japan were more appreciated in comparison to their previous locations. Ernest and Joseph captured this idea through their observations of Japanese norms. Ernest described, “The people here will cause you to see no trash on the streets and there’s not a trash can in sight. I come from a city where there’s a trash can on every corner, but that don’t stop you from seeing trash on the street, or it overflowing with trash. Why? They take their trash home. If you have trash, you take it home. It’s marvelous to see that people really care about the environment in ways like that. ET” Joseph made this same observation towards the public transportation. He stated, “It’s [trains] clean. They have fabric on their furniture, or their seats are heated, and people are just extremely nice. I remember in DC you’d get a nice train system put in, and in a day or so, somebody has sliced through the vinyl of the seating or tagged it with spray paint. They take care of their stuff which I was really surprised. JA”

Participants described how being immersed in another culture has reinforced a sense of cultural humility and reflection. All participants shared an appreciation for Japanese culture and their social norms. Barry expressed this sentiment when describing reactions to his inability to speak the language. He
commented, “I would say they are some of the most like polite, welcoming, and kindest people ever. Everyone is kind of willing to help out and are just super kind and understanding. Even if you don’t speak the language, some of the nicest people and culture that I’ve come across for sure. BH” Patrick shared the same reflective sentiment of his own humility with non-English speaking people in the US. He observed, “Just seeing other cultures can make you more humble about your own. The idea in the US is everyone should know English and, if you don’t, why are you in the States. I had that notion in my head and hadn’t really thought negatively of it before I came here. But being here and not knowing the native language and seeing how well I was treated and how the Japanese still would try to help me even if they didn’t know much English. It was very humbling and made me rethink a lot of things. PH”

Barry, who works for a Japanese company, described how the Japanese work culture evoked greater empathy and collectivistic thinking with his Japanese colleagues. He shared, “They’re very focused on figuring how to refine a process over time rather than invent a new way of doing things. I find myself having to explain my thinking a lot. So, it takes a lot more effort and understanding to be able to introduce a new way of doing things. I practice more empathy in thinking how people will perceive the idea to make sure something that’s polite of a current process. BH” Nathan described his gratitude for their ability to enforce and follow rules without much oversight. He commented, “What I’ve seen is that they are the politest human beings I’ve ever come across. They have that respect. Respectfulness is very familiar to me because I’m African and where I’m from is all about respect. They’re very self-sufficient and they don’t complain. They follow simple rules. I think that’s what fascinates me about them. They live a simple, content life, and don’t disturb you. NI”

The subtheme of **Risk Factors vs. Protective Factors** is defined as factors that either discourage or encourage adjustment. One protective factor that encourages adjustment includes previous international living or traveling experiences (Padden et al., 2011). Six participants had previously lived or travelled internationally in some capacity and were prepared for the vulnerability that cross-cultural adjustment creates. A second protective factor is having prior military experience either as a military child or service member. Two research participants were military kids who lived internationally before and were
accustomed to military culture and PCSing with families. Joseph, who grew up as a military child, described his familiarity with the military culture. Joseph stated, “Well, I was a Navy brat. My dad was a Senior Chief when he retired so it was a part of my life. When we stopped moving, it was around 1985, but I was still in the military system until 26. JA” When asked how being raised as a military child increased adjustment overseas, Alexander answered, “I was always used to making new friends, interacting with new people and figuring out how to do things differently. I didn’t grow up in one house and we didn’t always do one thing the same way. AG” Additionally, two research participants previously lived in Japan; one participant travelled abroad during college while the other lived as an expatriate in Tokyo. One participant, Joseph, prepared himself for the relocation by travelling to Yokosuka before the official move. Joseph commented, “I did my research. I visited here about a year prior to coming and I was in love with the people. JA”

In this sample, there were two participants who had never lived or travelled internationally. Ernest had limited travel experiences and had never travelled outside of the East coast of the United States. However, Ernest understood his wife was intentional on choosing Japan as her next duty station and grew accustomed to knowing they would eventually relocate internationally. Ernest stated, “Japan is Japan to me. I ain’t never been out of the country before. Not even a cruise. I never really been out of the DMV area before. That’s about as far as we’ve gone. I’ve went to Wisconsin one time and went to Florida. From what I know about getting out of your comfort zone, it’s all foreign to me. ET” Patrick did not have previous international travelling experiences and described the moving process as scary. He noted, “I hated the idea of moving around. So I grew up in the same town and stayed there until I went to college. I had never had to move other than going to college. So the idea of moving always scared me and it was actually a big transition point when my wife and I were dating. She sat me down and I had to think if this is going to be worth it because I knew she was going into the military. And it has never stopped being scary. I still don’t really like moving around that much. PH”

One risk factor described by each participant was the language barrier. Cory described language as a barrier while living off base in a Japanese community. He stated, “There’s kind of the added intimidation
that you don’t know the language. Because we live off base, it’s easier to feel a little socially isolated by the language barrier. CL” Joseph described the language barrier as stressful partly due to his low language acquisitional skills for his age. Joseph commented, “Having the language barrier is a big stressor. Trying to learn Japanese at 40 something years old makes it harder to retain. You do the best you can, but you learn how to adapt with the technology using Google Translate. JA” Barry described the language barrier as it relates to working in a Japanese company. He remarked, “It’s unique for me working for a company where I don’t speak the same language as a lot of the other people. There’s definitely challenges that I experience. Japanese is a super hard language and, unless you’re staying longer than 3 years, what’s the point that you actually learn it if you’re going somewhere else. BH”

The subtheme of Safety is defined as the participant’s perception of freedom from the frequent occurrence of risk, danger, theft, and crime. When asked how this relocation has affected their quality of life, research participants described a sense of relief and freedom to enjoy their surroundings. Cory described, “I think Japan is a really high trust society and things we would’ve been too scared to do in the U.S., we do here. We allow our five-year-old girl to go to the park on her own. We realized that we can let her have that independence because it’s just down the road. Whereas, in the U.S., it would be crazy to do that.” Barry’s response to this question mirrored the same sentiment of relief and an increased quality of life. He remarked, “I would say it’s the same quality or maybe higher in certain cases. For example, living in Japan is a lot safer than the U.S. or in many places where we’ve lived. So, that’s a step up in certain cases. BH” Ernest described an incident where his keys were in the door handle of his car, parked at a nearby gas station, while he went to work. He stated, “We were gone for at least four or five hours. Nobody touched my car. The keys were still in the door, and this is why I’m not pressed to leave.” Joseph dropped his wallet with $400 inside as well as his credit cards and identification cards. The Japanese person who found his wallet brought it to the base and turned it in to gate security. Joseph highlighted another form of safety that he felt from racial discrimination and homophobia. He described, “When I arrived to Yokosuka, I saw two military guys holding hands which I thought was odd because I always heard that there was a sense of racism or discrimination in the Japanese culture and it’s there. However, they don’t act upon their
Joseph continued to discuss how being in Japan was relieving and a refuge from the lack of safety he felt in the United States. He stated, “I was utterly excited to leave the states because it was a dark time. There was a new administration, and we didn’t know what kind of policies for LGBT standards would be upheld. We were kinda worried about that. We didn’t feel safe, especially in Washington, DC, so we were happy to be here in Japan. JA”

Overall, participants expressed excitement and satisfaction with choosing Japan as their duty station. Some participants chose Yokosuka because of its proximity to major cities like Tokyo and other mainland countries. Other considerations included choosing larger installations to increase the probability of employment. Only one participant was able to travel to Yokosuka beforehand to tour the location before formally moving. Six participants had lived or traveled overseas before and were accustomed to immersing themselves in diverse cultures. Two participants had never traveled outside of the United States before and still found adjusting to Japanese culture simpler than expected. Participants who worked alongside Japanese citizens found the interplay of Japanese work culture and language barriers difficult to manage. Each participant expressed general contentment with the Japanese culture, cleanliness of the country, ease of public transportation, and feelings of safety.

VII. Discussion & Limitations

In response to the dearth of research on male military spouses, the objective of this dissertation was to open a dialogue on the unique experiences of this group of spouses by identifying specific cross-cultural adjustment difficulties, coping practices, psychological stressors, programmatic policy changes, and social supports deemed especially relevant to male military spouses on foreign installations. Though the researcher initially sought a maximum of five participants, the researcher received an overwhelming response from 13 male spouses. Eight participants qualified for the study, signed an informed consent form, and completed the interview. Semi-structured interviews of eight research participants were conducted with responses revealing five emerging themes of The Utility of Relevant Supports, Stressfulness, Employment, Male Spouse Perspectives, and Adjustment. All research participants were experiencing an
OCONUS (Outside the Continental US) PCS for the first time, and none had prior military service experience themselves.

Two research participants were in same sex marriages and both of these participants discussed, at length, how the military did not support their previous moves due to same sex marriage being illegal. They had grown accustomed to trailing to different duty stations without formal military support. The researcher learned that same-sex couples were limited in which OCONUS locations could receive command sponsorship, e.g. not in the Middle East due to illegal same-sex marriage and relationships. One participant was an Italian citizen and had not resided in the United States before. Two participants were raised in military families and were accustomed to residing in different countries as military kids. Two participants had lived in Japan previously, one as an expatriate and one as a college student studying abroad. All research participants and their spouses chose CFAY (Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka) as their next duty station. Of the sample, seven participants sought employment once arriving in Yokosuka, though three participants were not working at the time of this study. Employment experiences ranged from software engineering, data analyst, landscaping, tech, ship repairing, nursing, and a nightclub owner.

Protective Factors for members of this sample included prior international experience, previous PCS experience, familiarity with the military culture, career mobility, and the ability to immerse themselves within the local environment and culture. All participants used support resources to prepare and adjust to Yokosuka though most utilized informal supports such as Yokosuka Military Spouses, a social media group on Facebook. Though three research participants attempted to use military spousal preference as a formal support for potential employment, only one successfully transferred their previous employment. Three participants had career mobility and utilized their employers in the U.S. to transfer their job overseas. Among the three participants who were not working, one chose to cease job searching in Yokosuka to concentrate on his MSW program. Two participants who were not working found it stressful to adjust to Yokosuka due to limited career mobility. Participants cited the lack of male presence in military social groups and lack of male presence in Fleet & Family as barriers to utilizing certain supports. Additionally, participants found certain military supports inaccessible to those who worked. All participants found
employment to be significant to their transitioning and adjustment in Japan. According to research participants, employment was used for multiple reasons including buffering psychosocial stressors from being the primary caregiver, being financially independent, reducing reliance on the military community, and increasing their local social supports. Employment moderated participants’ feelings of usefulness, agency, and reduced social isolation. Employment barriers were identified as lack of available jobs relevant to their particular skillsets and competition with Japanese workers who were allotted a number of jobs on the military base.

In terms of stressors, COVID restrictions were reported, among all participants, as a predominant environmental stressor and affected their quality of life in terms of childcare and travel limitations. Some participants whose spouses were part of certain commands incurred additional restrictions in preparation for their spouse’s impending deployments. All research participants expressed a preference for Japan and felt that adjusting to military culture was more difficult than adjusting to Japanese culture. Research participants felt that Japan was safer than their previous duty station and felt their families enjoyed a better quality of life in Yokosuka. Coping strategies for stress included employment, exercising, and martial arts. Of the sample, only one participant mentioned spiritual supports as helpful. Male spouses held strong beliefs concerning employment and correlated it to their sense of contribution and identity. Six participants mentioned the presence of mental health difficulties, such as depression and anxiety, largely attributable to unemployment or balancing role flexibilities, including childcare. Most of the research participants reported internalized pressures from social norms within the military community that were injurious to their masculinity. These social norms restricted their access to engaging with other families in activities that were primarily utilized by females. Participants described parameters that limited their interactions with female spouses or suggesting undue familiarity.

There were several additional subthemes that, while significant in influence, were excluded for the primary reason of having too few excerpts and being absorbed by more relevant, emerging subthemes. For example, subthemes, such as Sacrifices and Loss, were better paired with Psychosocial Stressors and Injuries to Masculinity. A subtheme of Creating Shared Meaning had too few excerpts and was better
captured in the subtheme of Joint Decision Making. Two additional subthemes of Embracing Japanese Culture and Cultural Humility reflected participants’ responses that showed an understanding of cultural nuances but were better captured in the Adjustment theme. Two participants shared microaggressions occurring within the military and Japanese community that were discriminatory in nature, but too few participants shared this experience; this subtheme, while deserving of future study, was excluded from this study.

The limitations of this dissertation was the small number of male participants, few numbers of spouses of enlisted service members (N=2), and few participants that identified as a minority (N=3). Additionally, the sample of participants contained only two same-sex spouses, which provided insight into the complexities of this fairly new community in the military. It must also be noted that this study provides insight into the perceived differences of male and female spouses but is primarily relegated to the social community of CFAY Yokosuka. Future longitudinal studies may incorporate male spouses from additional foreign installations as well. It is also significant to note that this study was conducted during the pandemic, which may have influenced the salience of psychosocial and environmental stressors. This study may be conducted again once the pandemic ends and people have returned to their normal functioning within society to yield different results.

Culminating factors, such as the timing of this study during a pandemic, the focus on only one military installation, and the diversity of this group of spouses concerning such things as the status of the spouse (enlisted or officer), race, the existence of children, and nature of the relationship (same or opposite sex), might initially suggest limitations of this study; however, the consistency and strength of the five emerging themes actually affirms the potential universality of their relevance and represents the focus for future study. In addition, future studies of male military spouses may lend perspective on the unique ways in which male spouses maintain equilibrium while balancing demands of the environment and their families. Previous studies on male spouses have explored the employment, cross-cultural adjustment, trailing spouse phenomenon, marital quality, and social support difficulties experienced from the global perspective. Other studies (Southwell et al. (2016) have discussed, in broad strokes, the
underrepresentation, isolation from other male spouses, and stigma related to gender norms. Studies, such as Alvah (2000) and Blakely et al. (2014), have discussed nontraditional roles posing challenges in marital relationships; and the crossover/spillover effects that military spouses have on service member job performance and well-being. However, this study gives explicit insight into the lived experiences of male military spouses transitioning to foreign military installations. This study gives shape to their individual experiences and which considerations, or characteristics, enhance or limit adjustment. More importantly, this study provides insight into specialty communities (e.g., same-sex spouses) and their particular needs. The male identity juxtaposed with familial and community feedback is further explored. Stress appraisals, psychosocial difficulties, and factors that build resilience are also explored in this study. Lastly, this study discusses how current installation supports, such as YESS (Yokosuka Enhanced Spouse Sponsorship) and Fleet & Family, are perceived and how these perceptions contribute to their underutilization. Though the population studied is small and diverse, it is clear that their experiences cross this diversity, and their specific experiences and needs differ from those of female military spouses. Future research focusing on male military spouses can provide insight for programmatic evaluations and the development of specific informal and formal supports targeting this group’s specific needs.
You May Qualify If You

- Are a Male Military Spouse
- Are at least 18 years old
- Are Command Sponsored & Reside in Japan
- Are NOT Considered a Dual Military Family
- Sign an Informed Consent Form

Potential Benefits

Participating in this study will contribute to research on the experiences of male spouses in CFAY Yokosuka, Japan.

Participation Involves

- One Virtual Interview through ZOOM

***Participants who complete the entire interview will be compensated with a gift card

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please contact Ciji L. Blue, LCSW at cijiblue@upenn.edu
Appendix B.

Male Spouse Intake Form

Please complete this initial demographic form. We ask that you only record your initials to protect your identity.

* Required

1. Email address *

2. What are your initials? Please do not record your Name. *

3. Are you a Service Member? *

   Mark only one oval.

   ○ Yes
   ○ No

4. Date of Birth? *

   Example: January 7, 2019

5. Ethnicity and/or Race? *
5. Ethnicity and/or Race? *

6. Highest Education Level? *

   Check all that apply.
   - Some Education Experience
   - High School Graduate
   - Some College
   - Bachelors Degree'
   - Some Graduate Study
   - Masters' Degree
   - Professional Degree

7. Gender *

   *Mark only one oval.*
   - Male
   - Transgender Male

8. When did you arrive to your current duty station? *

   *Example: January 7, 2019*

9. How many times have you PCSed before? *
10. Is this your first OCONUS PCS? *

   Mark only one oval.
   
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No

11. If No, what other OCONUS base(s) have you PCSed to?

12. Employment Status *

   Check all that apply.
   
   ☐ Full time (30+ hrs.)
   ☐ Part time (less than 30 hrs.)
   ☐ Currently Volunteering
   ☐ Full Time/Part Time Student
   ☐ Currently Unemployed

13. Number of Years as a Military Spouse *

14. Do you have previous travel or international experiences separate from the military? *

   Mark only one oval.
14. Do you have previous travel or international experiences separate from the military? *

*Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes
☐ No

15. Spouse’s Rank and Rate *


16. Do you have children? *

*Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes
☐ No

17. Do you have a history of prior military service? *

*Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes
☐ No

18. If Yes, how many years did you previously serve in the military and which branch?
Study Title: The Cross-Cultural Adjustment of Male Military Spouses Relocating Overseas

Principal Investigator: Ciji Blue

I am a student at the University of Pennsylvania, in the School of Social Policy & Practice. I am planning to conduct a research study, which I invite you to take part in a single interview that explores adjustment. This form has important information about the reason for doing this study, what I will ask you to do if you decide to be in this study, and the way I would like to use information about you if you choose to be in the study. The data collected will be de-identified to protect your identity and may be stored and distributed for future research.

Why are you doing this study?
You are being asked to participate in a research study exploring the degree of adjustment in Yokosuka, Japan.

What am I required to do in this study?
You will be asked to
• Provide demographical information (age, gender, highest education level, spouse’s rank
• Complete an interview that asks you about your perceived adjustment, the role of social supports in your life, and employment opportunities at CFAY Yokosuka.
• Complete the interview in its entirety.

Time Length: The questionnaire will take approximately 60-120 minutes to complete.

Study location: All study procedures will take place from your home computer.

I may quote your remarks in presentations or articles resulting from this work. A pseudonym will be used to protect your identity, unless you specifically request that you be identified by your true name.

What are the possible risks or discomforts?
Your participation in this study may pose the risk of emotional discomfort in being asked to reflect on sensitive issues that concern your quality of adjustment, utilization of military support programs, and identified social supports.

What are my rights as a research participant?
Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to complete the questionnaire, please stop and you may exit the survey.

Principal Investigator Contact Information
Ciji Blue
University of Pennsylvania
Email: cijiblue@upenn.edu

Consent
I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form.

Consent for use of participation in this study
Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:
______ (check box) I agree to complete the interview in its entirety.
______ (check box) I do not agree to complete the interview
Appendix D.

Dissertation Interview Questions (Final)

1. Can you describe your initial thoughts when you learned you were relocating to an overseas base?
   a. What were your initial reactions when you learned you were relocating to Japan?
   b. What factors contributed to your excitement about your upcoming transition?
   c. What factors contributed to any concerns about this recent transition?
   d. Had you travelled or lived overseas before?
   e. Did you anticipate certain obstacles or hurdles transitioning overseas? What feelings and reactions did you specifically have about Yokosuka?

2. Can you describe the preparations made for your transition overseas?
   a. Did you experience difficulties transitioning onto this installation?
   b. What personal or installation supports helped your transition?
   c. Were there new processes or requirements for onboarding that were difficult or unfamiliar than your previous duty station?

3. How has being deployed overseas affected you and your family’s quality of life?
   a. How would you describe your quality of life before PCSing here?
   b. Can you describe any new activities or experiences here that you enjoy?
   c. What specific factors here have enhanced your quality of life?
   d. What specific factors here have limited your quality of life?

4. How would you describe this overseas deployment from a cultural perspective?
   a. What specific cultural factors have made your adjustment easy?
   b. What specific cultural factors have made your adjustment difficult?
   c. How would describe your experiences with local host nationals?
   d. If negative, how have you addressed these encounters?

5. What were your previous employment experiences like before relocating?
   a. How significant was securing employment here?
   b. What have your employment experiences been like here?
   c. What organizations or people were helpful in locating employment, and in what specific ways were they helpful?
   d. What do you perceive as barriers to obtaining employment here?

6. What type of social supports did you have before relocating?
   a. How important was it for you to establish social supports here? Was it easy to establish social supports here?
   b. How were you able to make friends?
   c. How have your social supports been most beneficial here?
   d. Have you encountered any difficulties in establishing social supports here?
7. What are some unforeseen or unexpected enjoyments you’ve experienced during this relocation?

8. What are some unforeseen or unexpected stressors you’ve experienced here?

9. Do you perceive your experiences as different than female spouses, and, if so, in what specific ways?

10. Is there additional information you’d like to share concerning your adjustment?
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