

RESPONSE TO CDF RE ADF EMPLOYMENT OFFER

By Amanda McCue CF

Overarching Recommendation:

Implement / improve pay and conditions that more evenly distribute the domestic workload in ADF families and support dual career ADF families.

Background

One challenge faced by contemporary ADF families is the difficulty in maintaining a household in which both the ADF member and the ADF partner can engage in consistent, meaningful and rewarding employment. This is occurring in a societal setting in which the importance of decent work to health and wellbeing, financial security and quality of life is acknowledged, and in which the majority of Australian families are dual income. It is accepted in Australia and other similar countries that many of the employment challenges experienced by ADF partners result from the military lifestyle. Unemployment, underemployment and working in jobs for which they are overqualified has a negative impact on the health and wellbeing of ADF partners and their families, results in lower household income, and negatively impacts savings and the accrual of superannuation.

It is my view that it is essential for the ADF in terms of recruitment, retention, readiness and transition from the ADF, that partner employment challenges be addressed in part by improvements to ADF policy so that the employment offer by the ADF does not disadvantage ADF families (in comparison to civilian families) and provides a high standard of quality of life. **Without adequately addressing partner employment the ADF risks compromising the quality of life of ADF families and their short and long-term financial security.**

Current ADF support for partner employment is provided by the PEAP program which provides funding for individual job readiness for eligible partners undertaking a defence-related relocation. This is a valuable program which should be maintained. However, the current PEAP does not provide for the fact that many partners cannot use their education and training in the locations to which they are posted to and therefore cannot capitalise on their education, training and experience and continue to progress their careers. And importantly, whilst mobility is the underlying cause of many ADF partner employment challenges it is not the only one. The frequent and/or lengthy absences from home of ADF members on deployment, training and exercise may impact partner employment by placing the overwhelming majority of domestic workload on the ADF partner and rendering ADF partners 'solo parents.

Researchers at the University of Sydney recently analysed what young workers imagine will be important to their future success in work and family.¹ This is important information for the ADF to consider when deciding on what pay and conditions will help them attract, recruit and retain personnel now and into the future. The study found that formal workplace supports for care, such as paid parental leave and childcare, workforce flexibility and shared domestic labour are considered important for future career success by young workers.

¹ Hill E, Baird, M Vromen A et al (2019) Young women and men: imagined futures of work and family formation in Australia. Journal of Sociology 1-21.

It is my opinion that the current model of ADF employment views ADF members as family breadwinners and expects ADF partners (the vast majority of whom are women) to undertake the bulk of the domestic workload so that the ADF member can focus on their job. It is not uncommon for example for ADF partners to report that they don't start looking for work in a new location until the house has been set up, the children established in schools etc. (all while the ADF member has returned to work). There are also many stories of ADF partners who have had to work part time or casually because they cannot maintain full time employment (particularly if it involves shift work) when the ADF member is away.

According to the Australian Government's Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA)²:

- Australian women spend substantially more time on unpaid care work than men
- The unequal distribution of unpaid care work reinforces gender stereotypes, such as the 'male breadwinner model'
- Gender inequality in unpaid care work contributes to the gender inequalities in the labour market
- The redistribution of unpaid care work can reduce gender stereotypes and increase female workforce participation.

Time spent on unpaid care work can negatively affect a person's ability to participate in fully paid employment². In the 2017 ADF Families Survey³ 36% of respondents worked full time, 18% part time and 10% casual. 17% were not working but seeking employment, and 14% were not working nor seeking employment. Of those working part-time almost 1/3 wanted to work more hours and over 50% of those employed casually wanted to work more hours. Other findings identified an association between childcare access and partner unemployment. "ADF partners who are unemployed are most likely to report that they cannot access the childcare they need when compared to partners in some form of employment". The main barriers to childcare access reported in the survey were affordability, limited places available, and opening hours. The 2015 Defence Census⁴ collected information on why partners were not employed. Four of the top 10 reasons related to domestic responsibilities – 'to stay home and meet the needs of the family', 'my service-related absences from home make it difficult for my partner to work', 'to be home when the children are out of school', and 'childcare difficulties'. Only 6% reported that their partner chose not to work.

Whilst employment issues related to domestic workload may not be unique to ADF families the extent to which these issues are experienced may be. For example, it is not common amongst other occupations for an employee to be away for months at a time and for this to occur multiple times and in the absence of traditional and/or established support networks.

It is imperative that moving forward the ADF focus efforts on facilitating the redistribution of unpaid care work in ADF families, on reducing gender stereotypes and inequality of not just of those in uniform (which has been the focus of ADF gender equality efforts) but also their partners, and supporting dual career ADF families.

² Unpaid care work and the labour market. Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA). Australian Government.

³ 2017 ADF Families Survey. Department of Defence. Directorate of People Intelligence and Research.

⁴ Defence Census 2015. Public Report. Australian Survey Research Group.

Recommendations:

1. Expand employment assistance for ADF partners that addresses the challenges of deployment and other absences from home as well as relocation.

- (i) Extend PEAP to ALL partners requiring assistance with career development planning in the context of military life (not just those relocating). This could be provided throughout military life (as per the US DoD system) or at a minimum at key transition points in an ADF families journey- becoming an ADF partner, having children, relocating, preparing for transition etc.
- (ii) Reintroduce the education/training component of partner employment support to allow ADF partners to re-train into employment that will be more compatible with ADF life (avoid the previous ineligibility criteria such as having an existing degree that entirely missed the point about needing to re-train).
- (iii) Fund travel for ADF partners to attend job interviews in gaining location prior to relocation (to help reduce the period out of work during a relocation which has been reported as 5.4 months³).

2. Facilitate shared domestic responsibility in ADF households

- (i) Encourage greater uptake of FWA and leave arrangements by ADF members (particularly men), have leaders lead by example and make flex work the norm rather than the exception.
- (ii) Promote FWA and FSA as a means of sharing domestic responsibility and facilitating dual income households.
- (iii) Remove the distinction between maternity and parental leave and provide all members with 14 weeks paid leave on the birth or adoption of a child or increase paid parental leave to a minimum of 6 weeks.
- (iv) Provide/fund childcare assistance that improves the access and affordability of childcare and meets the needs (including hours required) of ADF families (this may not be standard childcare centres).
- (v) Introduce funding for practical support (house cleaning, lawn mowing, grocery delivery, childcare, after school care etc.) that will help ease the additional domestic workload during lengthy ADF members absences from home (this could be a means of supporting veteran and spouse-owned businesses).
- (vi) Improve housing and relocations policy so that ADF partners are not relied upon to establish the house in new location (see below).

2. Design leave and pay allowances for relocation that more accurately reflect the amount of work involved in relocating rather than rely on the current model that sees ADF partners putting their own careers on hold to get families settled in the new location

- (i) Make valet unpack standard for Defence relocations in order to expedite the unpacking process and reduce the burden on members and partners.
- (ii) Allow Members sufficient and reasonable time off work to relocate and set up house (rather than emphasising their return to work 'post-haste' while the partner completes the work⁵).
- (iii) Make the max relocation-related childcare assistance available in *both* losing and gaining locations.

⁵ Spanner, L (2017). Governing "dependents": The Canadian military family and gender, a policy analysis. *International Journal* 72(4) pp 484-502

- (iv) “Fix” the housing allocation system so members and families can be in the gaining location with plenty of time to establish the new housing arrangements and be at work by WEF dates.
- 4. Provide housing in areas that makes employment and a good quality of life for both the ADF member and ADF partner accessible**
- (i) Expand the Puckapunyal housing trial to all posting locations so that ADF families can choose housing locations that allow both the ADF member and the ADF partner reasonable access to their employment, childcare and leisure locations

Notes

This submission focuses on the pay and conditions aspect of supporting ADF partner employment as a means of creating the optimal employment offer that will support the ADF’s goal to be an employer of choice. For more comprehensive policy and program recommendations regarding ADF partner employment please refer to my Churchill Fellowship report available from <https://www.churchilltrust.com.au/fellows/detail/4264/Amanda+McCue>

References

- Unpaid care work and the labour market. Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA). Australian Government. Available from <https://www.wgea.gov.au/data/wgea-research/unpaid-care-work-and-the-labour-market>
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Author Biography

Amanda is a career development practitioner who specialises in assisting transitioning ADF, veterans and ADF partners. In 2017 she was awarded a Churchill Fellowship to investigate military spouse employment, and in 2019 she was awarded the Career Development Association of Australia Award for Excellence in Policy for her work.