

Should I Stay or Should I Go? An Examination of the Effects of Work and Family Factors on
Active-duty and National Guard and Reserve Service Members' Military Career Intentions

by

Allison Leigh Tidwell

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Auburn University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science

Auburn, Alabama
December 10, 2022

Keywords: military, retention, family systems, quantitative analysis

Copyright 2022 by Allison Leigh Tidwell

Approved by

Mallory Lucier-Greer, Chair, Associate Professor, Human Development and Family Science

Kyle L. Kostelecky, Associate Professor, Human Development and Family Science

Julianne McGill, Research Assistant Professor, Human Development and Family Science

Abstract

The Department of Defense (DoD) prioritizes the retention of military personnel to maintain a ready defense force and earn return on their investment of training highly skilled Service members. Prior research has examined how specific work-related factors, family related factors, and personal well-being impact Service members' career intentions; however, the cumulative effects of the associations between these factors on military career intentions remains unclear. The current study examined the contributions of work-related factors (i.e., organizational support, morale), family-related factors (i.e., work-family balance, romantic relationship quality), and personal well-being (i.e., depressive symptoms) on career intentions among a sample of 3,506 Soldiers who participated in the Army Study to Assess Risk and Resilience in Servicemembers (Army STARRS). Path analysis was conducted to model the direct and indirect effects of work-related factors, family-related factors, and personal well-being on Soldiers' intentions to remain in military service beyond their current service obligation and intentions to leave military service before the end of their service obligation if they were given the choice to do so. Additionally, a multigroup moderated path model was analyzed to assess whether the same factors emerge as important in predicting retention for active-duty Service members and National Guard and Reserve Service members.

A path model assessing the direct and indirect contributions of work-family balance and unit support on Soldiers' intentions to remain and intentions to leave through morale, relationship quality, and depressive symptoms demonstrated acceptable model fit ($\chi^2 = 267.752$, $df=32$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.960; TLI = 0.922; RMSEA = 0.047). The model accounted for 22.6% of the variance in intentions to remain and 17.1% of the variance in intentions to leave. The results revealed some significant direct and indirect effects of work-family balance and unit

support on intentions to remain and intentions to leave through morale, relationship quality, and depressive symptoms. Importantly, morale served as a key mediator linking the effects of the other variables to military career intentions. Multigroup moderated mediation analysis demonstrated that there were differences in the contributions of work-related factors, family-related factors, and personal well-being to military career intentions based on whether Soldiers were active-duty versus National Guard or Reserve ($\Delta \chi^2 = 60.771, df = 30, p < 0.001$). Greater unit support and work-family balance were associated with less severe depressive symptoms to a greater extent for active-duty Soldiers than National Guard or Reserve Soldiers. Similarly, greater unit support was associated with greater intentions to remain to a greater extent for National Guard or Reserve members than for active-duty Service members. Additional pathways approached statistically significant differences between these groups.

The study results may inform military and family policy and resource development that is sensitive to differential experiences based on duty status for the DoD to promote retention and mission readiness among its personnel. Military family policies and trainings for unit leaders may facilitate a more supportive and family-friendly work environment for Service members. Service members may also utilize existing resources to address their morale (e.g., Morale, Welfare, and Recreation programs), romantic relationship quality (e.g., relationship education programs), and mental health conditions (e.g., clinical treatment).

There were several limitations to the current study's design. These include the restrictions of secondary data analysis, the use of some single-item measures, and the use of educational attainment as a proxy for rank. Future studies may enhance understanding of the contributions of work-related factors, family-related factors, and personal well-being to Service members'

military career intentions by using more descriptive, multi-item measures and measuring specific constructs of interest (e.g., rank).

Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank Dr. Mallory Lucier-Greer for the encouragement, mentorship, and compassion as my major professor. Her leadership and support inspired me to pursue graduate education and I am grateful every day to have the honor of working alongside her. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Dr. Julianne McGill and Dr. Kyle Kostecky for providing valuable feedback as my faculty committee members. Many thanks are also due to my former and current colleagues at Military REACH, including Kate Abbate, Dr. Nick Frye-Cox, Haley Sherman, Dr. Davina Quichocho, Dr. Benjamin Burke, and others for their insight and encouragement. I owe a special thanks to Amber Beals, Family Programs Director of the 81st RD, U.S. Army Reserves, whose dedication to advocating for evidence-based policy and resources to promote the well-being of Reservists and their families inspired this thesis project.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family and friends who have supported me through this journey. To my graduate cohort members Sheila Sjolseth, Zeynep Su Altinoz, and others, thank you for providing continuous encouragement over the past two and a half years. Beginning graduate school in the midst of a global pandemic was no easy task, and I could not have made it this far without your support. To my mother, Karen, and my father, David, thank you for encouraging me to pursue my dreams and make a difference in the lives of others. I hope I have made you proud. To my brother, Blake, and sister-in-law, Mandy, thank you for reminding me to have fun during my journey through graduate school. To my friends Moira Johnson, Emily Eversull, and Allie Andersen, thank you for providing a listening ear and a shoulder to lean on during times of stress. Thank you to my partner, Richard, for inspiring me every day to put forth my best effort. I never would've finished this project without his support. Finally, thank you to my dog, Lunatic, for bringing light into my life and being the best study buddy ever.

Table of Contents

List of Tables	8
List of Figures	9
List of Abbreviations	10
Chapter 1: Introduction	11
Chapter 2: Literature Review	14
Retention	14
Theoretical Framework	17
Organizational Support	20
Morale	22
Work-family Balance	24
Romantic Relationship Quality	26
Personal Well-being	27
Demographic Considerations	28
Differential Experiences Based on Duty Status	30
Current Study	31
Chapter 3: Methods	33
Procedures	33
Sample Demographic Characteristics	34
Measures	35
Plan of Analysis	38
Chapter 4: Results	41
Preliminary Analyses	41

Multiple Mediation Model.....	42
Multigroup Moderation Model	47
Chapter 5: Discussion	50
Determinants of Military Career Intentions.....	50
Influences on Military Career Intentions Differ Based on Duty Status.....	55
Limitations and Future Directions	58
Practical and Policy Implications.....	61
Conclusion	64
References.....	67

List of Tables

Table 1. Correlations and descriptive statistics.....	80
Table 2. Direct effects within multiple mediation path analysis	81
Table 3. Indirect effects within multiple mediation path analysis	82
Table 4. Multigroup path analysis based on Soldiers' duty status.....	83

List of Figures

Figure 1. Conceptual model.....	84
Figure 2. Multiple mediation path analysis of associations among work-related factors, family-related factors, and personal well-being on Soldiers' intentions to remain and intentions to leave the military	85

List of Abbreviations

DoD	Department of Defense
U.S.	United States
Army STARRS	Army Study to Assess Risk and Resilience in Servicemembers
AAS	All Army Study
CDIC-SC	Composite International Diagnostic Interview Screening Scale
GED	General Educational Development Test
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
TLI	Tucker-Lewis Index
RMSEA	Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation
MWR	Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Program

Chapter 1

Introduction

The Department of Defense (DoD) sets organizational goals for recruitment, retention, morale, and mission readiness to maintain a highly trained military defense force for the United States of America (Deputy Under Secretary of Defense [DUSD], 2004; Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness [OUSDPR], 2021a; OUSDPR, 2021b). Retention is of particular importance as the DoD invests significant resources in leadership, strategy, and occupational trainings of Service members to ensure they may perform their military duties efficiently and effectively. To that end, the DoD may benefit from examining factors which contribute to Service members retention and may inform policy and resource development. Critical to the understanding and promotion of retention is the intersection of work and family life among military personnel.

The military and the family have both been referred to as “greedy institutions,” demanding the attention and investment of Service members, sometimes resulting in conflict between military and family obligations (Segal, 1986). Thus, to understand the contexts in which Service members choose to remain in or leave military service requires an examination of the pathways through which work and family experiences interact to affect Service members. The current study applies the theoretical perspectives of the personal choice model of military retention (Capon et al., 2007) and family systems theory (Kerr & Bowen, 1988) to explore the contributions of work-related factors, family-related factors, and personal well-being on military Service members’ career intentions as the first aim of the study.

Another point of consideration for military retention is the differential effects of part-time and full-time military status. Personnel in the United States Armed Forces may either serve in a

full-time position through active-duty service, or may serve in a part-time capacity in the Reserve Component, which includes both the National Guard and the Reserve (Kapp & Torreón, 2021). Members of the National Guard and Reserve serve as personnel who primarily pursue civilian careers in their day-to-day lives with regular military training (e.g., one weekend a month and a few weeks during summer) and may be called to active-duty service in times of need for additional military support (Purpose of Reserve Components, 2011). Balancing military duties (e.g., regular training, the possibility of being called to full-time service) on top of their civilian careers and family responsibilities may affect National Guard and Reserve Service members' military career intentions (Griffith, 2015; Schuh et al., 2016; Schumm et al., 2001). However, the pathways through which these factors interact to affect National Guard and Reserve retention remains unclear. Thus, the second aim of the current study is to examine whether the contributions of work-related factors, family-related factors, and personal well-being to Service members' career intentions differ based on full-time (i.e., active-duty) versus part-time (i.e., National Guard, Reserve) duty status.

In the sections that follow, a literature review of military retention discusses a theoretical framework and evidence of the contributions of work-related factors, family-related factors, and personal well-being to military career intentions. Differential experiences between active-duty versus National Guard and Reserve personnel are also presented. Second, the research questions informed by prior literature and theory for the current study are presented. Third, the current study procedures are reviewed, including data collection, an overview the sample, the measures used, and the plan of analysis. Fourth, results for the current study's analyses, including path analysis and multigroup mediation path analysis, are presented. Fifth, these findings are discussed in the context of the existing literature regarding military career intentions. Sixth,

limitations of the current study's design are acknowledged. Lastly, implications for policy and practice are explored with final conclusions.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Retention

Because the United States Armed Forces consists of all-volunteer personnel, these Service members have some choice about how long they want to serve. Thus, retaining highly skilled Service members requires consideration of their context and experiences to identify barriers to retention.

Upon first joining the military, Service members sign contracts in which they are obligated to complete a specific length of service (Members: Required Service, 2010). These contracts may range from four years for enlisted personnel to eight years among commissioned officers (OUSDP, 2016). Upon completion of the service obligation, Service members may choose to fully terminate their military service or extend their contracts for additional years of service. Service members may only leave military service when they have fulfilled their service obligation (Wadsworth & Southwell, 2011). In the context of the military workforce, retention refers to the rate of Service members voluntarily extending service beyond their initial service obligation (Kapp & Torreon, 2021).

Military retention may be assessed in a variety of ways, including at the organizational or individual levels via both objective and subjective measures. At the organizational level, retention speaks to turnover rates within the military system. That is, retention can be monitored at the organization-level by indicators such as the number or percentage of Service members who decide to renew their contract in comparison to the number or percentage of those who decide not to renew their contract.

Retention can also be assessed at the individual-level to include behavioral assessments (e.g., are individuals actively looking for new employment? Did they quit?) and attitudes (e.g., commitment to the workplace). In military and civilian samples, behavioral assessments of retention and retention-related attitudes tend to be correlated but are distinct constructs (e.g., Cohen et al., 2016; Kim, 1991). To assess retention in this study, the focus is on individual-level attitudes, specifically intentions to remain and intentions to leave the military given that these attitudes highlight opportunities for intervention to promote retention before Service members officially exit military service. *Intentions to remain* are a precursor to turnover that highlights the decision-making process to leave or stay in the military. In the civilian literature, intentions to remain have been assessed in relation to employee's long-term plans to stay with an organization (Nannarow et al., 2014). In the military context, intentions to remain are commonly measured in relation to Service members' plans to stay in the military until retirement, stay beyond their present service obligation but not until retirement, or leave upon completion of their current obligation (Huffman et al., 2008; Sachau et al., 2012; Tremble et al., 2003). Intentions to remain may also be measured using timelines not specified by service obligation or whether Service members have recently begun seeking employment elsewhere (Sachau et al., 2012).

A separate, but related measure of retention among Service members includes *intentions to leave*. Intentions to leave are operationalized as an employee's plans to leave their current job (Nannarow et al., 2014). Intentions to remain and intentions to leave have demonstrated high correlation in civilian samples ($r = -0.54-0.84$; Cho et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2020; Nannarow et al., 2014). However, research suggests that the two measurements of retention are independent constructs. For example, a study using a sample of 298 health care and social workers demonstrated differential associations between the job satisfaction, intentions to remain, and

intentions to leave, such that greater job satisfaction was associated with *greater* intentions to remain and *lower* intentions to leave (Nannarow et al., 2014). Confirmatory factor analysis in the same study revealed that aspects of intentions to remain and intentions to leave overlapped, but that the constructs were still separate constructs. These findings support the independence of intentions to remain and intentions to leave.

Prior research has established a link between Service members' intentions to remain or leave and actual retention; thus, as mentioned above, there seems to be a meaningful link between attitudes and behaviors. For example, a sample of 755 Soldiers (i.e., Service members in the Army) demonstrated that intentions to remain or intentions to leave the Army were the most significant direct predictor of actual reenlistment above and beyond other predictors, including expected consequences of staying or quitting, work satisfaction, and perceptions of Army life (Motowidlo & Lawton, 1984). Additionally, using administrative data on 564 enlisted Army personnel in their second term of service, Kim (1991) identified a significant association between military career intentions and actual reenlistment. These findings support the evaluation of intentions to remain and intentions to leave as proxies for estimating military retention before Service members make a final decision to leave military service.

Intentions to remain and intentions to leave are valuable points of interest because they express Service members' thoughts about retention before making a final decision to remain in or leave military service. As such, intentions to remain or leave are possible points of intervention for the DoD to improve retention. Intentions to remain or leave are modifiable in contrast to turnover after the fact, so the DoD may take steps to greater incentivize remaining in service to promote greater retention of Service members overall. Better understanding the

mechanisms that explain Service members' intentions regarding their military service will thus provide clearer opportunities for policy.

Theoretical Framework

The current study is guided by the personal choice model of military retention (Capon et al., 2007) coupled with a family systems perspective (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Adapted from civilian retention research, the personal choice model of military retention was developed to explain how work-related factors (i.e., community involvement, job involvement, organizational commitment, work satisfaction, work-family conflict, perceived organizational support, disposition, and met expectations) directly and indirectly contribute to Service members' intentions to remain in military service. The model posited that Service members' more favorable perceptions of their work-related experiences promoted greater intentions to remain. Since the development of the model, organizational support, work satisfaction, and work-family conflict have consistently emerged as salient predictors of military retention.

In the context of the personal choice model of military retention, perceived organizational support refers to Service members' perception of the appreciation and interest in one's well-being demonstrated by the military (Capon et al., 2007). Prior military research has operationalized perceived organizational support in a variety of ways. For instance, Wright and colleagues (2012) defined this construct as Soldiers' perception of the military's investment in supporting Soldiers' coaching, mentorship, and rewards. According to this perspective, support contributes to the professional development of Service members and encourages advancement in their military career. Other research observes perceived organizational support through the lens of leader and unit cohesion, which refers to the perceived level of commitment and support among Service members within military units (Armistead-Jehle et al., 2011). That is, cohesion is

reflective of a Service member's perception that they may rely on fellow unit members for support, open communication with unit leaders, and respect among unit members and leaders (Reed-Fitzke & Lucier-Greer, 2020). Support from unit members and leaders may contribute to a supportive work environment that encourages retention. Such support also plays a role in developing Service member morale (Squires & Peach, 2020). Therefore, organizational support, and in particular unit support from unit leaders and unit members, may have important implications for intentions to remain or leave.

In addition to perceived organizational support, the personal choice model of military retention identifies work satisfaction as another salient factor influencing intentions to remain in the military. Work satisfaction is the psychological disposition of people toward their work (Schultz & Schultz, 1986). This may include their contentedness with their job, their emotional reactions when assessing their work experiences, and/or their positive appraisals of their work. Work satisfaction may be estimated through proxy constructs. One such construct that is relevant to the military context is morale, which generally refers to motivation and enthusiasm to achieve mission success (Britt & Dickinson, 2006; Ivey et al., 2015; Wright et al., 2012). Work satisfaction has demonstrated significant associations with morale in civilian and military samples (e.g., Motowidlo & Borman, 1978; Upadhyay & Gupta, 2012). Thus, morale may be a contextually relevant representation of work satisfaction in a military sample when examining influences on military career intentions.

Lastly, while most constructs presented in the personal choice model of military retention are specific to workplace experiences, the model also accounts for a variable that lies at the intersection of work and family experiences: work-family conflict. Work-family conflict is described by Capon and colleagues (2007) as conflict between a Service member's work and

family obligations and functioning. The contribution of work-family balance on career intentions is a related but distinct construct. Work-family balance broadly refers to an individual's perception of their ability to fully engage in the roles they possess across life domains (Greenhaus et al., 2003). Work-family conflict may be considered as a component of work-family balance which reflects incompatible demands from work and family domains (Clark, 2000; Eby et al., 2005; Greenhaus et al., 2003). Thus, compared to work-family conflict, work-family balance may more broadly capture the effects of the intersection between work and family life domains on Service members' military career intentions.

The personal choice model of military retention primarily focuses on significant workplace factors that influence the career decisions of military personnel with some acknowledgement of the importance of family, namely the intersection of work and family life. However, family systems theory highlights a need to consider the role of family-related factors more holistically. According to a family systems perspective, families consist of interdependent units, including individuals, subsystems, and the family as a whole (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Associations within and among these units can influence individual- and family-level outcomes. Family systems theory highlights the concept of interdependence, such that in couple relationships each partner influences the thoughts and behaviors of the other. Romantic relationship quality has been examined for its association with military retention, but the proposed nature and direction of this association varies. Some studies indicate that choosing to stay in the military and endure related stressors (e.g., extended separation during deployment) can have detrimental effects on couple relationship quality (Kritikos et al., 2019; Moelker et al., 2015). However, others suggest that relationship quality and satisfaction may interfere with

Soldiers' work functioning, and in turn affect their military readiness and decision to remain in military service (Carter et al., 2015).

Another key subsystem identified by family systems is that of the individual. That is, individual experiences have implications for an individual's own outcomes and those of the subsystems around them (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). As such, it is worth considering Service members' personal circumstances as having influence on their career intentions. One such circumstance includes their mental health. Several studies have examined associations between mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, mental distress, and military career intentions with mixed findings (Lancaster et al., 2013; Vasterling et al., 2015; Wright et al., 2012). Improving Service member mental health has also been leveraged as a means to reduce attrition among military enlisted recruits (A. Williams et al., 2004).

The determinants of military career intentions as informed by the personal choice model of military retention and family systems theory are explored in more detail below. These include organizational support, morale, work-family balance, romantic relationship quality, and depressive symptoms.

Organizational Support

Organizational support refers to Service members' perception of the appreciation and interest in one's well-being demonstrated by the military (Capon et al., 2007). In the context of the current study, organizational support specifically refers to aspects of cohesion among military units, in which there is mutual support, open communication, and respect within a unit (Reed-Fitzke & Lucier-Greer, 2020). Observing organizational support through the lens of unit support may inform policy and procedures that contribute to a more cohesive work environment.

Unit support has demonstrated important, but at times mixed associations with military career intentions.

Unit Support

A key aspect of organizational support is the provision of support among unit members and leadership. This sense of support contributes to cohesion and thus may influence career decisions. For instance, Vasterling et al. (2015) reported from their longitudinal study of 740 active-duty enlisted Soldiers that lower levels of unit support (i.e., support from military peers and leaders) were associated with greater rates of military attrition. However, in one study surveying 892 Soldiers who had recently returned from deployment, there was no significant association between unit cohesion and intentions to remain (Wright et al., 2012). King et al. (2020) surveyed 63,290 Air Force personnel and found similar results, as unit cohesion was again not significantly associated with intentions to remain. In another study of 1,203 Air Force personnel, perceived social support was negatively associated with work-family conflict (Sachau et al., 2012). Meanwhile, work-family conflict was associated with Service members' work satisfaction and career intentions.

It may be that unit cohesion is inconsistently related to retention *directly*, but evidence suggests that unit cohesion is related to well-being and health, factors that impact retention. Thus, unit cohesion may be *indirectly* related to retention. For example, in a sample of 1,939 new Soldiers in basic training, increases in unit cohesion were associated with better mental health, fewer sleep problems, confidence in managing stress reactions, and tolerance of basic training stressors (J. Williams et al., 2016). In turn, these factors were associated with a higher likelihood of a successful graduation from basic training.

Role of Leadership

Within a military unit, leaders are tasked with planning, coordinating, and accomplishing their assigned missions, and to do so, they need the engagement and buy-in of their unit. Thus, a primary responsibility of unit leaders is to offer support and facilitate unit cohesion. Service members' perceptions of support from unit leaders has demonstrated effects on commitment and retention. For instance, King et al. (2020) found that in a sample of 3,998 Canadian military personnel, receiving greater support from military supervisors (e.g., offering subordinates help when a problem arises) was associated with Service members' greater commitment to the military. In turn, greater levels of commitment were associated with reduced turnover intentions. Similarly, Hattke et al. (2018) reported that a sample of German military personnel demonstrated that more supportive unit leadership perceived by unit members was associated with Service members' intentions to remain in their military careers for longer periods of time.

Beyond social support sourced from military leaders, Service members' trust in and respect for their leadership may also have important implications for retention. Among a sample of 285 Air Force officers, Service members' trust in military leadership was inversely related to their intentions to remain in the military, such that more trust was associated with lower intentions to leave (Milligan, 2004). In another study conducted by Charbonneau and Wood (2018), perceptions of immediate leadership among a sample of 714 Canadian military personnel was associated with unit cohesion, which was then associated with Service members' career intentions, specifically intentions to leave. These findings indicate that in addition to social support, leaders contribute to cohesion among unit members and can affect intentions to remain and intentions to leave both directly and indirectly.

Morale

The sections that follow explore how morale may factor into decisions about retention. Prior research has observed both direct and indirect contributions of morale to retention among military personnel.

Direct Role of Morale

Morale appears to be an important factor in military retention for some (e.g., new recruits, single Service members), but not all, Service members. Schumm and Bell (2000) report that a sample of Army personnel demonstrated that morale was significantly associated with retention intentions among single Service members. A more recent postdeployment examination of 892 Soldiers found that morale was not significantly associated with Soldiers' intentions to remain in the Army when accounting for the simultaneous effects of posttraumatic stress disorder, depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms, unit cohesion, and perceived organizational support (Wright et al., 2012). However, using a sample of 3,998 new recruits in the Canadian Armed Forces, Anderson et al. (2022) found that personnel who reported higher levels of morale were typically those who reported greater levels of commitment to staying in the military.

The Mediating Role of Morale

Morale may also be an important linking mechanism between work-related factors and military retention. For instance, Langkamer and Ervin (2008) reported that morale explained the relationship between work psychological climate and intentions to leave among a sample of 649 Army officers. Additionally, morale is closely associated with unit cohesion (Manning, 1991). In a sample of 1,224 Canadian military personnel surveyed by Ivey et al. (2015), unit cohesion (e.g., trust in unit members) was associated with personal morale, such that those with greater unit cohesion reported greater morale. In another Canadian sample of military personnel, morale explained the relationships between perceptions of military leaders, Service member role

stressors (e.g., role ambiguity), military identification, and thus intentions to remain in the military (Squires & Peach, 2020). These results suggest that morale serves as an important bridge between work-related factors and military career intentions.

Work-family Balance

The personal choice model of military retention (Capon et al., 2007) highlights the intersection of work and family as an important construct for understanding decisions about retention, a reminder that decisions to stay in or leave the military are multifaceted and are posited to include the input from meaningful others. Work-family balance has been associated with career intentions in civilian samples. For instance, Odle-Dusseau et al. (2012) found that work-family balance mediated the association between discrepancies in family time and work with intentions to leave among 330 university employees. Researchers have also examined associations between work-family balance and career intentions among military personnel. King et al. (2020) reported that among a sample of 1,309 women Air Force personnel, Service members' perceived success at managing work and family demands was associated with their intentions to remain in military service (King et al., 2020). Alternatively, Kelley et al. (2001) found among a sample of mothers serving in the Navy that concerns about balancing military duties with family obligations contributed to their intentions to leave military service.

Work-Family Conflict

Work-family conflict, a component of work-family balance, also has implications for Service members' military career intentions, such that greater work-family conflict is typically associated with lower levels of military retention (e.g., Tucker et al., 2005; Zarei, 2019) but there is some notable variability in findings. Tucker et al. (2005) found that among 1,489 Soldiers, greater work-family conflict was associated with greater turnover. Similarly, another study of

250 Iranian military personnel found that greater work-family conflict both directly and indirectly contributed to intentions to leave military service (Zarei, 2019). Capon et al. (2007) found that work-family conflict indirectly contributed to intentions to remain in a sample of 97 New Zealand military personnel. More specifically, greater work-family conflict was related to greater identification with one's job, which in turn was associated with greater affective commitment to working in the military, and lastly with greater intent to remain. However, work-family conflict was not directly associated with intentions to remain. Similarly, Heilmann et al. (2009) found that work-family conflict was not directly associated with Service members' turnover intentions, but was indirectly associated with family satisfaction with military life and hence turnover intentions. Service members who reported greater family satisfaction tended to report lower levels of work-family conflict and lower levels of turnover intentions. These findings highlight the interdependence of family members and the effects of family experiences on military career intentions.

Perceptions of Work-family Balance

Several factors can contribute to Service members' perception of better work-life balance that may indirectly influence retention. Service members who experience work overload may report poorer perceptions of their work-family balance (Heilmann et al., 2009). Huffman et al. (2008) found among a sample of 230 Soldiers that a more family-friendly work environment makes it easier to balance work and family demands and thus contributes to greater intentions to remain in the military beyond their current service obligation. Similarly, Bourg and Segal (1999) found that Service members and their spouses reported that family-friendly policies and informal unit leader practices toward family members contributed to greater commitment to military service through reductions for work-family conflict. Military leadership appears to play a key

role in Service members' perceptions of work-family balance. In one study, Service members and their spouses reported that their immediate supervisors were more supportive of work-life balance than the military as a whole (Matsch et al., 2009). Overall, these findings suggest that work-family balance may directly and indirectly contribute to military career intentions.

Romantic Relationship Quality

In line with the supposition that decisions to stay in or leave the military are complex and are likely influenced by the input from meaningful others, this study expands the lens of the personal choice model of military retention (Capon et al., 2007) to include the role of one's couple relationship, specifically the quality of the romantic relationship in determining retention. There is a saying in the military that "you recruit the Service member, but you retain the family" (AUSA, 2019). In other words, it is a family-level decision to remain in the military and the quality of life of the spouses (and dependents) matters. The quality of Service members' romantic relationships holds important implications for military career intentions. For instance, in addition to satisfaction with other life domains (e.g., health, relationship with children), satisfaction with romantic relationships demonstrated direct influence over reenlistment intentions among a sample of 8,165 Navy personnel (Wilcove et al., 2003).

Mediating Role of Romantic Relationship Quality

Suppositions are that service members' relationship quality may function as a linking mechanism between work-family balance and military retention. Andres et al. (2012) reported that among a sample of Dutch military personnel, greater work-family conflict was associated with greater intentions to leave the military through poor relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, Woodall et al. (2020) found that experiences of work-family conflict can contribute to poorer marital quality. The link between work-family conflict and romantic relationship quality was

further supported by Long (2022), who sampled 186 Reserve members and found significant correlations between relationship quality (especially satisfaction) and work-family conflict. Thus, the current study considers romantic relationship quality as a potential bridge between work-family balance and Service members' military career intentions.

Personal Well-being

This final section explores individual-level factors that have some bearing on decisions to remain in or leave the military. These include mental health, specifically, depressive symptoms, and personal characteristics, such as age and gender.

Depressive Symptoms

Mental health has far reaching implications for readiness, and depression is a central component of mental health that has demonstrated associations with several aspects of both readiness (e.g., ability to focus) and retention. In a sample of 892 Soldiers who had recently returned from deployment, Soldiers who reported mental health symptoms, including depressive symptoms, were more likely to report intentions to leave military service (Wright et al., 2012). In another study, which included 522 National Guard Soldiers, greater predeployment depressive symptom severity was associated with lower intentions to reenlist among men but not women, though the gender difference may have been due to reduced power for the smaller subsample of women (Lancaster et al., 2013). Interestingly, Porter et al. (2022) found that for Service members who were discharging for any reason other than Honorable discharge reported worsening mental health symptoms (e.g., depressive symptoms) leading up to military separation, noting that there could be a bidirectional effect (intentions to leave the military preceded depressive symptoms as opposed to depressive symptoms being a driving force in deciding to leave the military). Another study of more than 570,000 Service members demonstrated that having a mental health diagnosis

(e.g., depression) when becoming eligible to receive military health benefits was associated with a greater risk of early attrition from military service (i.e., before the standard four years of active-duty service; Ireland et al., 2012). These findings indicate that depressive symptoms may contribute in some way to military career intentions.

Demographic Considerations

As mentioned, some demographic factors, namely age and gender, have also emerged as important constructs in the consideration of career intentions among Service members. Age and gender are posited to have both a direct and indirect influence on career intentions as they are meaningful for several of the constructs on the personal choice model of military retention and the broadened model that will be tested for this study.

The influence of age on career intentions has varied across the literature. For instance, a study of 740 enlisted Soldiers who recently returned from deployment demonstrated that younger Service members were at greater risk of attrition from military service (Vasterling et al., 2015). In another study conducted by Kirby and Naftel (2000), no association was found between age and retention among 3,269 enlisted Reserve members. However, higher rank and/or higher pay grades (characteristics which are associated with age) were significantly associated with Reserve member retention and may have masked the effects of age.

Some research has also focused on associations between age and other correlates of military retention. For example, a sample of more than 18,000 military personnel demonstrated that younger Service members were more likely to report satisfaction with their job compared to Service members aged 35 or older (Sanchez et al., 2004). While the specific role of age is unclear among other determinants of military career intentions (e.g., unit cohesion), it remains a factor worthy of consideration for the current study.

Another demographic characteristic that may have important implications for military career intentions is gender. A growing body of literature has identified gender differences in expected duration of military service. Asch et al. (2012) reported that women military officers demonstrated lower retention compared to their male peers. Similar findings were reported in a study of 3,269 enlisted Reserve members (Kirby & Naftel, 2000). Smith and Rosenstein (2017) found among a sample of students at the U.S. Naval Academy that women reported a shorter expected duration of military service compared to men, with the average expected durations reported differing by approximately 3 years. In the same study, on average, women reported greater concerns with managing military and family responsibilities during service and thus planned to delay their plans for childrearing more than did men. In another study, women with children in particular may consider work-family balance as a motivating factor for intentions to remain or leave the military (Kelley et al., 2001). This sentiment was echoed by Waruszynski et al. (2022) in an analysis of factors contributing to military career intentions among women serving in the Canadian Armed Forces. Given this evidence, it appears that gender, perhaps as a proxy for gender roles related to family life, may influence Service members' career intentions and is thus considered in the current study.

Gender may also contribute to correlates of military career intentions. For instance, female Service members tend to report greater rates of depression compared to their male peers (Haskell et al., 2010; Welsh et al., 2019). Gender has also demonstrated associations with unit cohesion. For instance, a study of 25,620 Air Force personnel demonstrated that, on average, women reported lower levels of unit cohesion than did men (Welsh et al., 2019). Military culture often emphasizes hypermasculinity, which may deter women in the military from feeling connected to their male peers. A study of 1,396 Soldiers found that women's greater perception

of hypermasculine culture in military units was indeed associated with lower levels of unit cohesion (Rosen et al., 2003). These findings indicate that gender may indirectly affect military career intentions through other factors such as personal well-being and unit cohesion.

Differential Experiences Based on Duty Status

Serving in the Active Component of the United States Armed Forces (i.e., active-duty) demands a higher level of commitment to military duties than serving in the Reserve Component (i.e., National Guard or Reserves). Despite the differences in time committed to military service based on duty status, it appears that there is no clear difference in retention among active-duty and National Guard and Reserve members. Between 2011 and 2012, the Active and Reserve components nearly met or exceeded their retention goals (i.e., retained the goal number of Service members in each component; Kapp, 2013). Retention in this time period may in some part be attributed to the higher rates of deployment in post-9/11 conflict, as there is some evidence that deployments have been associated with increased retention among Service members (Hosek, 2011). While there were no major differences in retention goal achievement, it is possible that the relationships between work-related, family-related, and personal factors which drive military career intentions may differ between full-time and part-time military service.

Regarding work-related factors, a sample of 24,881 Service members demonstrated that National Guard and Reserve members reported greater satisfaction with their military jobs than did active-duty Service members (Sanchez et al., 2004). This may be related to findings from Randall (2006) which suggest that National Guard and Reserve members intentions to re-enlist are associated with unit morale. Furthermore, a study including 26,250 members of the Army National Guard found that Service members' perceptions of their leaders' interest in taking care

of the well-being of unit members was significantly associated with their retention intentions following deployment (Randall, 2006). However, there was no source of comparison against active-duty Service members. Thus, it is unclear whether the contribution of work-related factors to military career intentions differs based on duty status.

Regarding family-related factors, Griffith (2008) reported that National Guard and Reserve personnel may become overwhelmed by unexpected military-related demands that affect their intentions to remain in the military. Family-related perceptions of service may also influence career intentions, as was observed in a study of more than 37,000 National Guard and Reserve members in which spouses' favorable attitude toward service was associated with greater likelihood of retention (Fugita & Lakhani, 1991). As such, it appears that family-related factors (e.g., work-family balance) may be of relevance to the investigation of factors contributing to career intentions among National Guard and Reserve members. However, similarly to work-related factors, it is unclear whether the contributions of family-related factors on military career intentions differs based on duty status. The current study seeks to discern differential effects in the mechanisms which explain military career intentions based on duty status (i.e., active-duty versus National Guard or Reserve).

Current Study

The purpose of the current study is to test a broadened version of the personal choice model of military retention (Capon et al., 2007) based on modifications from recent empirical research and suggestions from family systems theory. More specifically, this model will examine the contributions of work-related factors, family-related factors, and personal well-being (specifically, depressive symptoms) in association with Service members' intentions to remain in

and intentions to leave military service. The study seeks to address the following research questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): How will work-related factors, family-related factors, and personal well-being predict Service members' intentions to remain in and/or leave military service? See conceptual model in Figure 1.

Expectations are that work-family balance will be directly associated with intentions to remain and/or leave military service and indirectly associated with intentions to remain and/or leave military service through (a) romantic relationship quality, (b) depressive symptoms, and (c) morale. Additionally, suppositions are that unit support will be directly associated with intentions to remain and/or leave military service and indirectly associated intentions to remain and/or leave military service through (a) depressive symptoms and (b) morale.

Research Question 2 (RQ2): Does duty status (i.e., being a member of the Active Component versus the Reserve Component [National Guard or Reserve]) moderate the associations of work-related factors, family-related factors, and personal well-being, and their influence on Soldiers' intentions to remain in and/or leave military service?

This research question examines whether the model fits similarly for those in the Active and Reserves components. Research in this area is still developing, thus no specific hypotheses are presented. Rather, these exploratory analyses will provide an important foundation for future work.

Chapter 3

Methods

Procedures

Secondary data analysis was conducted using cross-sectional data from the Army Study to Assess Risk and Resilience in Servicemembers (Army STARRS), specifically the All Army Study (AAS) component. Data were collected between 2011 and 2013 and over the course of that time, there were ten iterations of the survey that were disseminated to participants. Participants were recruited through stratified probability sampling of Army units with more than 30 Soldiers at their home garrisons. Soldiers in the selected units attended group sessions to learn about the purposes and procedures of the AAS. Those Soldiers who volunteered to participate completed informed consent forms and agreed to release information from their military administrative records. The first rounds of data collection took place in quarterly sessions between 2011 and 2012. Additional data were collected from Soldiers stationed in Afghanistan in 2012, as well as from United States Army Reserves and Army National Guard units who were activated and deployed to Afghanistan between 2012 and 2013. In total, 21,449 Soldiers provided data.

The initial purpose of Army STARRS was to assess, identify determinants of, and reduce risk of suicide among Soldiers. Each Soldier participating in the AAS completed a self-administered questionnaire in a single 90-minute session. Participants completed self-report measures of their demographic characteristics, mental health (e.g., self-harm, depression, anxiety, anger, substance use), and physical health (e.g., injuries, fatigue, pain). Additional measures included military characteristics (e.g., service history, duty status, deployment experiences, unit experiences), mental and physical health service utilization, social

relationships, spirituality, and ownership of weapons. For the current study, Soldiers reported demographic characteristics (e.g., duty status, highest level of education, marital status) and completed measures of their unit support, morale, work-family balance, romantic relationship quality, depressive symptoms, intent to remain in the military beyond their obligation, likelihood of exiting military service prior to fulfilling their obligation if given the choice, and duty status.

To address the hypotheses and research questions for the current study, inclusion criteria required that Soldiers complete one of the survey interactions that included assessments of military career intentions; six out of the ten iterations asked about military career intentions. This reduced the initial sample size of 21,449 Soldiers to 8,072 Soldiers. Additional inclusion criteria required Soldiers to have reported their duty status (i.e., active-duty versus activated National Guard/Reserve). Furthermore, given the interest of retaining Soldiers in military service, Soldiers who indicated that they were eligible for retirement at the time of data collection were excluded from analyses because their decision-making processes for remaining in and/or leaving the military are contextually different. Accounting for these inclusion criteria, the sample size was further reduced to 5,429 Soldiers. The final inclusion criteria required Soldiers to be in a committed romantic relationship with one partner and report on their relationship quality. The final analytic sample for the current study was 3,506 Soldiers.

Sample Demographic Characteristics

Of the 3,506 Soldiers in the analytic sample, 2,969 (84.7%) were active-duty personnel, and 537 (15.3%) were activated National Guard or Reserve members. The majority of these Soldiers were men ($n = 3,063$; 87.4%). Most participants were White ($n = 2,522$; 71.9%), with the second most reported race being Black ($n = 577$; 16.5%). All participants attained at least a high school diploma or GED equivalent, with only around one-fifth having completed at least a

four-year college degree ($n = 746$; 21.6%). Education level may serve as a proxy of military rank, as commissioned military officers are required to complete at least a four-year college degree (“Join the military,” 2021). Most participants were married ($n = 2,539$; 72.4%); 16.4% had never been married ($n = 576$). Many participants did not have children ($n = 1,163$; 33.2%), but among those who did, they typically had between one and three children ($n = 1,890$; 55.3%). Of participants who reported on their history of deployment, most had completed at least one humanitarian deployment (86.7%), peacekeeping (77.5%) and/or combat deployment (80.2%). Approximately 15.8% of participants had never been deployed.

Measures

Work-related Factors

Unit support was assessed using five continuous items. For each item, Soldiers were asked to rate their level of agreement with a statement on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly agree*) to 5 (*Strongly disagree*). Items included the ability to rely on other unit members for help, open communication with leaders, respect for non-commissioned and commissioned officers, and whether unit leaders were interested in unit members’ well-being. After reverse coding responses, higher item scores indicated greater agreement. Responses for these items were combined into mean composite scores to indicate overall perceptions of unit support. Higher composite scores indicated greater perceived unit support ($\alpha = 0.909$, $M = 3.679$, $SD = 1.010$). See Table 1 for descriptive statistics and correlations.

Soldiers completed a single, continuous item to report their morale (i.e., “How would you rate your morale?”). Responses were organized on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (*Very low*) to 5 (*Very high*). Higher scores indicated greater morale ($M = 3.340$, $SD = 1.080$).

Family-related Factors

Work-family balance was assessed using a single, continuous item (i.e., “How successful do you feel at balancing your work and family life?”). Soldiers reported their perceived level of success at balancing work and family life on a four-point scale. Responses ranged from 1 (*Very successful*) to 4 (*Very unsuccessful*). Responses were reverse coded, such that higher scores indicated greater self-perceived success at balancing work and family life ($M = 3.232$, $SD = 0.767$).

Romantic relationship quality was assessed with a 3-item indicator. Participants rated aspects of their relationship on a scale that ranged from 1 (*All the time*) to 6 (*Never*); items included how frequently they had considered ending their romantic relationship, how often they felt that their romantic relationship is going well, and how often they confided in their romantic partner. Responses were coded such that higher scores indicated greater perceptions of romantic relationship quality. Together, scores from these three items were combined into mean composite scores to indicate each Soldier’s overall romantic relationship quality. Higher composite scores indicated greater relationship quality ($\alpha = 0.805$, $M = 5.003$, $SD = 1.047$).

Personal Well-being

Depressive symptoms were measured using the CIDI-SC Major Depressive Episodic Scale (Kessler et al., 2013). This measure consisted of four items, for which participants reported how often they felt sad or depressed, felt down about how things are going, felt little or no interest or pleasure in things, and felt worthless in the past 30 days. The frequency of experiencing these symptoms was rated on a scale that ranged from 1 (*All or almost all the time*) to 5 (*None of the time*). Items were reverse coded and combined into mean composite scores to indicate the severity of each Soldier’s overall depressive symptoms. Higher composite scores indicated more severe depressive symptoms ($\alpha = 0.931$, $M = 1.504$, $SD = 0.770$).

Military Career Intentions

Regarding the first outcome variable, intentions to remain, Soldiers completed a single item to report on their military career intentions (i.e., Which of the following best describes your current Army career intentions?). Participants selected one of seven statements which best described their current career intentions. Response options included: “Definitely stay in Army until retirement,” “Probably stay in Army until retirement,” “Definitely stay in Army beyond present obligation/not necessarily until retirement,” “I am currently eligible for retirement and plan to stay in the Army,” “I am undecided whether to stay in the Army after my present obligation,” “I will probably leave the Army after my present obligation,” and “I will definitely leave the Army after my present obligation.” As mentioned previously, Soldiers who reported eligibility for retirement were excluded from analyses given that their future career decisions are contextually different than those not eligible for retirement. The item was recoded, such that a score of 1 indicated that the Soldier did not intend to stay in military service beyond the completion of their present obligation, a score of 2 indicated that the Soldier was undecided regarding whether they will stay in the military beyond their present obligation, and a score of 3 indicated that the Soldier intended to stay in military service beyond their present obligation ($M = 2.420$, $SD = 0.810$).

Regarding the second outcome variable, intentions to leave, Soldiers reported whether they would leave military service prior to the fulfilment of their present obligation if they were given the option to do so (i.e., “If given the option, would you leave the Army before the end of your present obligation?”). Responses were recorded via a single, continuous item on a five-point scale and ranged from 1 (*Definitely would leave*) to 5 (*Definitely would not leave*). Scores

were reverse coded, such that higher scores indicated greater likelihood to leave before the fulfillment of their present service obligation if given the chance ($M = 2.337$, $SD = 1.337$).

Moderator

Duty status (i.e., active-duty versus activated National Guard/Reserve) was assessed by a single, dichotomous item through which Soldiers reported whether they were a National Guard or Reserve Soldier. Responses were reverse coded, such that a 0 identified the Soldier as active-duty, whereas a 1 identified the Soldier as National Guard or Reserve ($M = 0.153$, $SD = 0.360$).

Covariates

Age ($M = 30.450$, $SD = 7.898$, range 18 to 61), gender (0 = man, 1 = woman), highest level of education (i.e., GED or equivalent, high school diploma, some post high school education but no certificate or degree, post high school education with a certificate or degree, 2-year Associate degree, 4-year college degree, or graduate or professional study), White race (i.e., 0 = not White, 1 = White), Black race (i.e., 0 = not Black, 1 = Black), and deployment history (i.e., sum of total number of deployments) were included in the model as covariates. These factors were included given established relationships between age, gender, education, race, and constructs within the model as indicated by correlational analyses (e.g., women tend to report higher depressive symptoms).

Plan of Analysis

Preliminary analyses were conducted to examine univariate and bivariate statistics using SPSS. Initial descriptive statistics were used to determine the placement of control variables in the model, such that the model accounted for significant bivariate relationships between age, gender, highest level of education, race (i.e., White, Black), deployment history, and the primary study variables.

Next, a mediated path model was fit using MPlus to understand the direct and indirect relationships between work-related, family-related, and personal factors and their association with intentions to remain in and leave the military (see Figure 1). Unit support was entered as a direct and indirect predictor of intentions to remain and intentions to leave through depressive symptoms and morale. Morale was entered as a direct predictor of intentions to remain and intentions to leave. Work-family balance was entered as a direct predictor of intentions to remain and intentions to leave, a direct and indirect predictor to depressive symptoms through relationship quality, and an indirect contributor to intentions to remain and leave through depressive symptoms and morale. Relationship quality was entered as an indirect contributor to intentions to remain and intentions to leave through depressive symptoms. Depressive symptoms were entered as direct and indirect predictors of intentions to remain and intentions to leave through morale.

Model fit was assessed based on several indices, including a chi-square difference test, comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA). A non-significant chi-square value that does not exceed the critical chi-square value (i.e., $\chi^2 > 46.19$, $df = 32$, $p < 0.05$) indicates acceptable model fit (Kline, 2011). A CFI value greater than 0.95 indicates acceptable model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). A TLI value greater than or equal to 0.90 indicates acceptable model fit. Lastly, an RMSEA value less than 0.05 indicates good model fit, but values below 0.08 or 0.10 indicates fair and mediocre fit, respectively (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Then, a multigroup moderated mediation model was fit. The moderating variable was duty status, thus the analyses assisted in determining whether the path model fits similarly for active-duty Soldiers and National Guard and Reserve Soldiers. First, a model in which all

structural parameters were constrained to be equal across groups was computed. Then, another model in which all structural parameters varied freely was computed. To determine whether there were significant differences between the constrained and unconstrained models, a chi-square difference test was conducted. A statistically significant chi-square difference value indicates significant differences between the models. If there were differences, each path was examined individually (note: covariates were not assessed for moderation). Overall model fit was assessed based on a model fit indices as described above (i.e., $\chi^2 > 0.05$; CFI ≥ 0.95 ; TLI > 0.90 ; RMSEA < 0.05 good, < 0.08 fair, < 0.10 mediocre).

Chapter 4

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Descriptive statistics and correlations among main variables and control variables are presented in Table 1. Most correlations among variables were in the expected directions, and none of the correlation coefficients indicated multicollinearity (i.e., $r > 0.70$). Importantly, greater unit support, greater morale, greater work-family balance, and lower depressive symptoms were related to greater intentions to remain. Lower unit support, lower morale, lower work-family balance, lower relationship quality, and greater depressive symptoms were related to greater intentions to leave. Interestingly, Soldiers' relationship quality was not significantly correlated with their intentions to remain when a positive relationship was expected ($r = 0.015, p = 0.383$). Furthermore, several variables were not significantly correlated with Soldiers' duty status. These included unit support ($r = -0.017, p = 0.314$), relationship quality ($r = 0.027, p = 0.111$), intentions to remain ($r = 0.033, p = 0.054$), and intentions to leave ($r = -0.030, p = 0.075$).

Unit support ($r = -0.017, p = 0.314$) and relationship quality ($r = 0.027, p = 0.111$) were not correlated with duty status, nor were intentions to remain ($r = 0.033, p = 0.054$) and intentions to leave ($r = -0.030, p = 0.075$) correlated with duty status. However, differences were observed regarding morale ($r = 0.077, p < 0.001$), work-family balance ($r = 0.110, p < 0.001$), and depressive symptoms ($r = -0.072, p < 0.001$), such that National Guard and Reserve Soldiers tended to report greater morale, greater work-family balance, and less severe depressive symptoms. Furthermore, National Guard and reserve members tended to be older ($r = 0.087, p <$

0.001), more tended to report being White ($r = 0.057, p < 0.001$), and fewer tended to report being Black ($r = -0.045, p < 0.001$) than active-duty Soldiers.

Multiple Mediation Model

To address research question one and hypotheses one and two, a multiple mediation path model was conducted to examine the direct and indirect associations between unit support and work-family balance and intentions to remain and intentions to leave through morale, relationship quality, and depressive symptoms. Several control variables were included based on associations with the main variables, including age, gender, White racial identity, Black racial identity, educational attainment, and deployment history. Intentions to remain and intentions to leave were allowed to covary. Based on model fit indices, the path model demonstrated acceptable model fit ($\chi^2 = 267.752, df=32, p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.960; TLI = 0.922; RMSEA = 0.047). Though the χ^2 statistic was statistically significant, this was likely a result of the large sample size. Based on *R*-square values, 22.6% of the variance in intentions to remain and 17.1% of the variance in intentions to leave were accounted for by the path model. Figure 2 provides the graphic representation of the model. Direct effects can be found in Table 2 and indirect effects are provided in Table 3.

Direct Effects

Unit Support. Accounting for all other variables, greater unit support was associated with less severe depressive symptoms ($\beta = -0.214; p < 0.001$). Greater unit support was also associated with greater morale ($\beta = 0.449; p < 0.001$) and greater intentions to remain ($\beta = 0.117; p < 0.001$). Finally, greater unit support was associated with lower intentions to leave ($\beta = -0.135; p < 0.001$).

Morale. Accounting for all other variables, greater morale was associated with greater intentions to remain ($\beta = 0.172; p < 0.001$). Greater morale was also associated with lower intentions to leave ($\beta = -0.208; p < 0.001$).

Work-family Balance. Accounting for all other variables, greater work-family balance was associated with greater relationship quality ($\beta = 0.284; p < 0.001$). Greater work-family balance was also associated with less severe depressive symptoms ($\beta = -0.321; p < 0.001$) and greater morale ($\beta = 0.195; p < 0.001$). Though lower work-family balance was associated with greater intentions to leave ($\beta = -0.058; p < 0.001$), work-family balance was not associated with Soldiers' intentions to remain ($\beta = 0.020; p = 0.256$).

Relationship Quality. Accounting for all other variables, greater relationship quality was associated with less severe depressive symptoms ($\beta = -0.149; p < 0.001$). Poorer relationship quality was also associated with greater intentions to remain ($\beta = -0.046; p < 0.001$). However, relationship quality was not associated with Soldiers' intentions to leave ($\beta = 0.014; p = 0.400$).

Depressive Symptoms. Accounting for all other variables, more severe depressive symptoms were associated with lower morale ($\beta = -0.242; p < 0.001$). More severe depressive symptoms were also associated with greater intentions to leave ($\beta = 0.077; p < 0.001$). However, depressive symptom severity was not associated with Soldiers' intentions to remain ($\beta = -0.022; p = 0.222$).

Indirect Effects

Unit Support. All the indirect paths beginning with unit support are explored below.

Intentions to Remain. Accounting for all other variables, in general, unit support had significant total ($\beta = 0.207; p < 0.001$) and total indirect effects ($\beta = 0.091; p < 0.001$) on Soldiers' intentions to remain. Morale explained the indirect association between unit support

and intentions to remain, such that greater unit support was associated with greater morale, which was in turn associated with greater intentions to remain ($\beta = 0.077$; $p < 0.001$). Depressive symptoms did not explain the association between unit support and intentions to remain as an independent mediator ($\beta = 0.005$; $p = 0.223$). However, morale and depressive symptoms worked together to explain the association between unit support and intentions to remain, such that greater unit support was associated with less severe depressive symptoms; less severe depressive symptoms were associated with greater morale, which in turn were associated with greater intentions to remain ($\beta = 0.009$; $p < 0.001$).

Intentions to Leave. Accounting for all other variables, unit support had significant total ($\beta = -0.255$; $p < 0.001$) and total indirect effects ($\beta = -0.120$; $p < 0.001$) on intentions to leave. Unit support was indirectly associated with intentions to leave through morale, such that greater unit support was associated with greater morale, which was then associated with lower intentions to leave ($\beta = -0.093$; $p < 0.001$). Similarly, depressive symptoms explained the indirect association between unit support and intentions to leave, such that greater unit support was associated with less severe depressive symptoms, which were then associated with lower intentions to leave ($\beta = -0.017$; $p < 0.001$). Morale and depressive symptoms also worked together to explain the association between unit support and intentions to leave. Greater unit support was associated with less severe depressive symptoms; less severe depressive symptoms were associated with greater morale, which in turn was associated with lower intentions to leave ($\beta = -0.011$; $p < 0.001$).

Work-family Balance. All the indirect paths beginning with work-family balance are explored below.

Intentions to Remain. Accounting for all other variables, work-family balance had a significant total ($\beta = 0.064$; $p < 0.001$) and total indirect effects ($\beta = 0.044$; $p < 0.001$) on intentions to remain. Morale explained the indirect association between work-family balance and intentions to remain, such that greater work-family balance was associated with greater morale, which was in turn associated with greater intentions to remain ($\beta = 0.034$; $p < 0.001$). Relationship quality also explained the indirect association between work-family balance and intentions to remain, such that greater work-family balance was associated with greater relationship quality, which was in turn associated with lower intentions to remain ($\beta = -0.013$; $p = 0.005$). However, Soldiers' depressive symptom severity did not explain the association between work-family balance and intentions to remain as an independent mediator ($\beta = 0.007$; $p = 0.221$).

There were interactions between morale, relationship quality, and depressive symptoms as multiple mediators of the association between work-family balance and intentions to remain. Greater work family balance was associated with less severe depressive symptoms, which were associated with greater morale, which was then associated with greater intentions to remain ($\beta = 0.013$; $p < 0.001$). Also, greater work-family balance was associated with greater relationship quality, which was associated with less severe depressive symptoms, which was associated with greater morale, which was finally associated with greater intentions to remain ($\beta = 0.002$; $p < 0.001$). However, this indirect path was not significant when morale was removed as a mediator ($\beta = 0.001$; $p = 0.226$).

Intentions to Leave. Accounting for all other variables, work-family balance had significant total ($\beta = -0.141$; $p < 0.001$) and total indirect effects ($\beta = -0.083$; $p < 0.001$) on intentions to leave. Morale explained the indirect association between work-family balance and

intentions to leave, such that greater work-family balance was associated with greater morale, which was in turn associated with lower intentions to leave ($\beta = -0.040$; $p < 0.001$). However, relationship quality did not explain the association between work-family balance and intentions to leave ($\beta = 0.004$; $p = 0.402$). Depressive symptoms explained the indirect association between work-family balance and intentions to leave, such that greater work family balance was associated with lower depressive symptoms, which in turn were associated with lower intentions to leave ($\beta = -0.025$; $p < 0.001$).

There were interactions between morale, relationship quality, and depressive symptoms as multiple mediators of the association between work-family balance and intentions to leave. Greater work-family balance was associated with less severe depressive symptoms, which were associated with greater morale, which was associated with lower intentions to leave ($\beta = -0.016$; $p < 0.001$). Similarly, work-family balance was associated with greater relationship quality, which was associated with less severe depressive symptoms, which were associated with lower intentions to leave ($\beta = -0.003$; $p < 0.001$). Finally, greater work-family balance was associated with greater relationship quality, which was then associated with less severe depressive symptoms; more severe depressive symptoms were associated with greater morale, which was lastly associated with lower intentions to leave ($\beta = -0.002$; $p < 0.001$).

Control Variables

Several covariates were included in the model based on previous research and significant associations with main variables in the current study. Soldiers who were older tended to report greater morale ($\beta = 0.083$; $p < 0.001$), greater intentions to remain ($\beta = 0.290$; $p < 0.001$), and lower intentions to leave ($\beta = -0.176$; $p < 0.001$). Women tended to report lower unit support ($\beta = -0.102$; $p < 0.001$) and more severe depressive symptoms ($\beta = 0.070$; $p < 0.001$). Soldiers who

identified as White tended to report greater romantic relationship quality ($\beta = 0.090$; $p < 0.001$) and lower intentions to remain ($\beta = -0.067$; $p < 0.001$). Soldiers who identified as Black tended to report lower unit support ($\beta = -0.075$; $p < 0.001$) and lower romantic relationship quality ($\beta = -0.080$; $p < 0.001$). Soldiers with higher levels of educational attainment tended to report greater work-family balance ($\beta = 0.034$; $p = 0.051$), greater unit support ($\beta = 0.099$; $p < 0.001$), and greater morale ($\beta = 0.079$; $p < 0.001$). Finally, Soldiers who had completed more deployments tended to report greater intentions to remain ($\beta = 0.122$; $p < 0.001$). Intentions to remain and intentions to leave covaried, such that greater intentions to remain were associated with lower intentions to leave ($\beta = -0.454$; $p < 0.001$).

Multigroup Moderation Model

To address research question 2, multigroup moderation of the path model was conducted with duty status (i.e., active-duty versus National Guard or Reserve) as the moderating variable. First, an unconstrained model was tested in which all paths were allowed to vary across the two groups. Then, an additional model was tested in which all paths were constrained to be equal across the two groups. To determine whether differences existed between active-duty and National Guard or Reserve Soldiers, a chi square differences test was conducted. Multigroup moderation results are presented in Table 4. The test indicated that there were statistically significant differences between active-duty and National Guard or Reserve Soldiers ($\Delta \chi^2 = 60.771$, $df = 30$, $p < 0.001$). Given these results, each path of the primary model was examined separately unconstraining the path and comparing model fit to the fully constrained model. Chi square differences tests were again conducted to compare these new models with the fully constrained model. A few significant differences emerged between active-duty and National

Guard or Reserve Soldiers. Those paths are explored here. All other paths are presented in Table 4.

The first significant difference was identified in the path from unit support to depressive symptoms ($\Delta \chi^2 = 5.049$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.025$). Unit support was associated with less severe depressive symptoms to a greater extent for active-duty Soldiers ($\beta = -0.224$; $p < 0.001$) than National Guard and Reserve Soldiers ($\beta = -0.188$; $p < 0.001$). Additionally, duty status moderated the path from work-family balance to depressive symptoms ($\Delta \chi^2 = 6.279$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.012$), such that work-family balance was associated with less severe depressive symptoms to a greater extent for active-duty Soldiers ($\beta = -0.325$; $p < 0.001$) than National Guard and Reserve Soldiers ($\beta = -0.260$; $p < 0.001$). Duty status also appeared to moderate the association between unit support and intentions to remain ($\Delta \chi^2 = 6.069$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.014$). Unit support was associated with intentions to remain to a greater extent for National Guard and Reserve Soldiers ($\beta = 0.193$; $p < 0.001$) than active-duty Soldiers ($\beta = 0.102$; $p < 0.001$).

Three additional moderated pathways approached significance, including the paths between morale and intentions to leave ($\Delta \chi^2 = 3.769$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.052$), relationship quality and intentions to remain ($\Delta \chi^2 = 3.388$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.066$), and depressive symptoms and intentions to leave ($\Delta \chi^2 = 3.609$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.057$). Lower morale may matter more for active-duty Soldiers ($\beta = -0.215$; $p < 0.001$) compared to National Guard or Reserve Soldiers ($\beta = -0.156$; $p < 0.001$) regarding their intentions to leave. Additionally, in a comparison that approached significance, greater relationship quality was associated with lower intentions to remain for active-duty Soldiers ($\beta = -0.056$; $p = 0.001$), but relationship quality and intentions to remain were not associated among National Guard or Reserve Soldiers ($\beta = 0.011$; $p = 0.748$). Lastly, it may be

that depressive symptoms are associated with intentions to leave among active-duty Soldiers ($\beta = 0.087$; $p < 0.001$), but not National Guard or Reserve Soldiers ($\beta = 0.002$; $p = 0.960$).

Chapter 5

Discussion

This study first aimed to explore how work-related factors, family-related factors, and personal well-being contributed to Service members' intentions to remain in or leave military service. Furthermore, prior research indicated that challenges associated with balancing military duties and full-time civilian careers may complicate military career decision-making among members of the Reserve Component (i.e., National Guard and Reserves; Griffith, 2015; Kapp & Torreon, 2021; Schuh et al., 2016; Schumm et al., 2001). Thus, this study also sought to examine potential variation in the interactions of work-related factors, family-related factors, and personal well-being as determinants of Service members' career intentions based on whether they are active-duty versus National Guard or Reserve members. Below, the key takeaways, limitations and future directions, and implications derived from this study are explored.

Determinants of Military Career Intentions

The first purpose of this study was to explore how work-related factors, family-related factors, and personal well-being predict Service members' intentions to remain in and/or leave military service. Work-related factors tested in this model included Soldiers' self-reported unit support and morale. Family-related factors included self-reported perceptions of work-family balance and romantic relationship quality. Lastly, Soldiers' personal well-being was reflected through their self-reported depressive symptoms. Multiple factors emerged as salient determinants of military career intentions. Importantly, while individual determinants were assessed, the influence of these factors on military career intentions were observed holistically across life domains. That is, each of these factors functioned together to inform Service members' intentions to remain in or leave the military.

Supportive Work Environments are Critical for Retention

The contributions of unit support and morale highlighted that the supportive nature of Service members' work environment is of important consideration for their intentions to remain in or leave the military. First, it was hypothesized that greater unit support would be directly associated with greater intentions to remain and lower intentions to leave, and indirectly associated with these outcomes through lower depressive symptoms and greater morale. The results indicated that greater unit support was directly associated with greater intentions to remain and lower intentions to leave. That is, Soldiers who reported greater perceived support from their unit members and leaders tended to report greater intentions to remain and lower intentions to leave the military. These findings align with a recent investigation of retention among 740 post-deployment active-duty Soldiers; perceptions of low cohesion among their unit members and leaders were associated with a greater likelihood of leaving the military (Vasterling et al., 2015). Notably, in that study, poor unit cohesion and fewer years in the military were the only two work-related factors associated with military attrition. Deployment-related stressors and war-zone stress exposure were not directly associated with retention. Those findings coupled with findings from the current study position unit cohesion as an important leverage point for addressing retention.

Beyond the direct associations between unit support and military career intentions, unit support was also related to two salient constructs that also had some bearing on military retention. This means that unit support had both a direct and an indirect effect on retention, primarily through depressive symptoms and morale.

Previous research established a link between Service members' mental health and their career intentions, with poorer mental health (e.g., more severe depressive symptoms) being

associated with lower intentions to remain (Lancaster et al., 2013) and greater intentions to leave (Wright et al., 2012). This investigation positioned depressive symptoms as a mediator, or linking mechanism, between unit cohesion and retention. Findings suggest that depressive symptoms did mediate the association between unit support and *intentions to leave*. However, depressive symptoms did not mediate the association between unit support and *intentions to remain*. These differential results were somewhat surprising but may indicate that depressive symptoms serve as a more of a motivating factor to leave the military than to stay. That is, Service members who have more severe depressive symptoms may seek to leave the military in response to their poor mental health, while those who are in good mental health may not derive their status as a reason to stay in the military. Congruent with the current study's findings, a profile analysis of 6,501 Canadian military personnel conducted by Meyer et al. (2013) demonstrated that Service members who were uncommitted to their military jobs tended to report having more severe depressive symptoms. These Service members also engaged in greater job-seeking outside of the military context. Similarly, it appears that depressive symptoms are a significant contributor to Service members' desire to leave the military and may push them towards seeking other careers.

Morale was also posited to be a linking mechanism between unit support and military career intentions. Previous research has demonstrated close positive associations between perceived cohesion among unit members and morale, such that greater unit support was associated with greater morale (Ivey et al., 2015). Furthermore, some research has demonstrated associations between Service members' morale and their intentions to remain (Ivey et al., 2015; Schumm & Bell, 2000). In the current study, Soldiers who reported greater unit support tended to report greater morale, and in turn tended to report greater intentions to remain and lower

intentions to leave. Though depressive symptoms did not mediate the association between unit support and intentions to remain, morale explained an association between depressive symptoms and both intentions to remain and intentions to leave. These findings highlight the important mediating role morale plays in connecting Service members' perceptions of unit support to their military career intentions as well as how personal mental health (e.g., depressive symptoms) appears to spill over to impact morale, which then has robust implications to retention.

Balancing Work and Family Life and Mental Well-being Matter for Retention

Next, the model highlighted the family-related factors that were theorized to impact retention. Specifically, work-family balance was positioned to be directly associated with intentions to remain and/or leave military service and indirectly associated with intentions to remain and/or leave military service through romantic relationship quality, depressive symptoms, and morale.

Interestingly, work-family balance was not directly associated with Soldiers' intentions to remain, but it was associated with intentions to leave. At first glance, it may appear that these findings contradict previous research regarding the salience of work-family balance for retention. For example, King et al. (2020) surveyed 1,309 Air Force women and discovered that success at balancing work and family demands contributed to retention, namely intentions to remain in the military. In the current study, work-family balance was not associated with intentions to remain, but poorer work-family balance was associated with greater intentions to leave. This, in part, may align with previous research in which factors associated with perceptions of work-family balance, such as work-family conflict, have contributed to intentions to leave (Zarei, 2019). Like depressive symptoms, it is possible that work-family balance is a more salient determinant of reasons to leave military service than to stay. For instance, it's possible that Service members

who feel that they are unable to balance their work and family obligations may choose to leave the military and focus on their family obligations. This would reflect the struggle many military families face with the competing obligations of the military and the family as “greedy institutions” (Segal, 1986).

A similar dilemma has been reflected in the civilian literature. For example, Watanabe and Falci (2016) found that university employees who reported greater conflict between work and family obligations tended to report greater intentions to leave. Another study of 620 health care and senior services customer-contact employees demonstrated a direct relationship between poorer work-family balance and greater turnover intentions, reinforcing the role of work-family balance as a potential deterrent from remaining in one’s job (Vanderpool & Way, 2013).

However, maintaining a satisfactory balance between work and family obligations may not necessarily serve as an incentive for Service members to stay in the military.

Various indirect associations between work-family balance and the two indicators of retention, intentions to remain and intentions to leave, were also examined. First, relationship quality explained the association between work-family balance and intentions to remain, such that greater work-family balance was associated with greater relationship quality, which in turn was associated with lower intentions to remain. This finding was contradictory to expectations. Wilcove et al. (2003) reported that a sample of 8,165 Navy personnel demonstrated through structural equation modelling that greater satisfaction with romantic relationships, as a component of personal factors, was associated with greater intentions to reenlist. No similar path through relationship quality was found from work-family balance to intentions to leave in the current study. This also contrasts with some prior findings. A Dutch sample demonstrated a link from work-family conflict to intentions to leave through relationship satisfaction (Andres et al.,

2012). Though the current study's results differ from prior research, the inclusion of additional mediating variables may help better elaborate on the mediating role of relationship quality.

In the current study, depressive symptoms did not independently mediate the association between work-family balance and intentions to remain or intentions to leave, but work-family balance was associated with more severe depressive symptoms. This result is consistent with a study of war-zone-deployed conducted by Borowski et al. (2021) Veterans which found that men who reported that work interfered with family responsibilities tended to have more severe depressive symptoms.

Finally, morale appears to have played a key mediating role for the association between work-family balance and military career intentions. That is, greater work-family balance was associated with greater morale, which in turn was associated with greater intentions to remain and lower intentions to leave. In addition, morale also helped to explain the mediating roles of relationship quality and depressive symptoms in predicting military career intentions. Soldiers who reported greater work family balance tended to report greater romantic relationship quality, less severe depressive symptoms, greater morale, and thus greater intentions to leave and lower intentions to remain. Without the context of morale, relationship quality and depressive symptoms were not significant mediators for both career intentions outcomes. This finding highlights that the mechanisms through which work-family balance can contribute to career intentions is multifaceted and thus require the simultaneous consideration of work-related factors, family-related factors, and personal well-being for retention.

Influences on Military Career Intentions Differ Based on Duty Status

The second aim of this study was to explore whether this model of retention fit similarly for Soldiers based on their duty status (i.e., being a member of the Active Component versus the

Reserve Component [National Guard or Reserve]). In other words, do these determinants of retention matter similarly for active-duty members and those serving in the National Guard or Reserve? Given the exploratory nature of this investigation, specific outcomes were not hypothesized. Multigroup moderated mediation indicated a significant difference between active-duty and National Guard or Reserve members in the hypothesized path model. This initial finding demonstrates that work-related factors, family-related factors, and personal well-being may contribute to Service members' career intentions in different ways depending on whether a Service member is serving in the Active Component versus the Reserve Component. Further analyses identified several specific pathways which differed between the two groups.

The first significant differences observed between active-duty and National Guard or Reserve Soldiers were in the paths from unit support and work-family balance to depressive symptoms. In general, Soldiers who reported greater perceived support from fellow unit members and unit leaders tended to report less severe depressive symptoms. This association was more robust for active-duty Soldiers. Similarly, Soldiers who reported greater work-family balance tended to report less severe depressive symptoms. This association was also amplified for active-duty Soldiers. Given the limited research on differential associations in work-related factors, family-related factors, and personal well-being, these findings offer novel insight into relationships among various determinants of military retention. It may be that for Soldiers who serve in the military as a full-time occupation, their mental health is more closely tied to unit cohesion, a central source of work-related social support, and the ability to balance work and family demands (Brooks & Greenberg, 2018). Importantly, although the relationships between unit support, work-family balance, and depressive symptoms were stronger for active-duty Soldiers, they were still significant for National Guard and Reserve Soldiers as well.

An additional significant difference between active-duty and National Guard or Reserve Soldiers was observed in the path from unit support to intentions to remain. Among both active-duty and National Guard or Reserve personnel, Soldiers who reported greater perceptions of support from fellow unit members and unit leaders tended to report greater intentions to remain in the military. This association was more robust for National Guard and Reserve Soldiers. As mentioned previously, certain determinants of career intentions may function as incentives for Service members to remain in the military. Perhaps feeling more supported by one's unit members and leaders may serve as such an incentive. Randall (2006) reported that among a sample of 26,250 Army National Guard personnel, perceptions of leaders' interest in unit members' well-being contributed to Soldiers' intentions to remain in the military. The current study echoes these results and suggests that unit support is indeed a salient factor related to retention intentions among Reserve Component members. National Guard and Reserve members commit less working time to the military and balance military responsibilities with their civilian careers (Kapp & Torreon, 2021). Thus, Reserve Component Service members may be disconnected from their fellow unit members. It's possible that feeling a sense of connectedness with their unit members may be a source of encouragement to continue in military service.

Several paths in the model also approached significance acknowledging some potential differences between active-duty and National Guard or Reserve Soldiers. For instance, only active-duty Soldiers who reported lower levels of morale tended to report greater intentions to leave. Morale and intentions to leave were not associated for National Guard or Reserve Soldiers. Prior research has demonstrated a link between morale and intentions to *remain* among a sample of National Guard and Reserve members (e.g., Randall, 2006), similar to the findings in the current study. Thus, morale may be a more salient determinant of National Guard or Reserve

member's intentions to *remain* compared to their intentions to *leave*, though future research establishing a statistically significant result will be required to reach this conclusion.

Another observation that approached significant differences between active-duty and National Guard or Reserve Soldiers was in the path from couple relationship quality to intentions to remain. Active-duty Soldiers who reported greater relationship quality tended to report lower intentions to remain. This was not observed among National Guard or Reserve Soldiers. There was no significant difference between active-duty and National Guard or Reserve personnel in the lack of a contribution of romantic relationship quality to Service members intentions to leave. These results suggest that while relationship quality may be important for active-duty Service members' intentions to remain, it may be a less salient contributor to career intentions for National Guard and Reserve Service members.

The last observation to approach significant differences between active-duty and National Guard or Reserve Soldiers was the association between depressive symptoms and intentions to leave. In examining the samples separately, active-duty Soldiers who reported more severe depressive symptoms tended to report greater intentions to leave. As discussed earlier, it may be that poorer mental health may function as a deterrent from continuing in military service but not an incentive to remain in the military. This may be true specifically for active-duty personnel rather than National Guard and Reserve Soldiers, who may consider not the status of their mental health when planning their military careers. However, future research with significant results will be required to obtain a more accurate depiction of this phenomenon.

Limitations and Future Directions

The findings of this study must be interpreted in the context of its limitations. First, all participants in the study were members of the Army. The results may have been more

generalizable to all Service members if participants from various military branches were included. However, it is important to note that prior research among more diverse samples of domestic and international military personnel demonstrated similar contributions of determinants of career intentions. Thus, the findings of the current study are still somewhat generalizable to American and some international Service members.

Another limitation regarding the sample used for the current study is that data collection occurred between 2011 and 2013. The operations in Iraq and Afghanistan which were a response to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States were concluding during the early 2010s. As such, it is possible that the context of military service during this time may not reflect similar experiences to Service members nearly a decade later. Future studies may collect more recent data from Service members to understand whether similar patterns in the contributions of work-related factors, family-related factors, and personal well-being emerge.

Third, this study was guided by the personal choice model (Capon et al., 2007), a family systems perspective, and recent empirical research to guide these inclusion of retention determinants. Yet, given the secondary nature of the data analyses, the selection of study variables and constructs were limited. Specifically, some constructs were measured with single-item indicators (i.e., work-family balance, morale, intentions to remain, and intentions to leave). More robust measures may provide greater insight into future investigations. Furthermore, the measure of morale did not use descriptive language (i.e., “How would you rate your level of morale?”) that would ensure shared meaning of the construct among Soldiers completing the questionnaire. It is possible that the differences in how Service members personally define morale may have reduced the validity and reliability of the measure. Future research may include more comprehensive and descriptive measures to provide a more nuanced understanding of the

contributions of work-related factors, family-related factors, and personal well-being on Service members' career intentions.

Also, a few constructs (e.g., community involvement, met expectations) from the personal choice model were not included in this model because they were not assessed in the Army STARRS dataset and thus could not be included in the analyses. Future research on factors contributing to Service members' career intentions may incorporate these constructs into the context of the expanded model in the current study. Another variable that would have been helpful to include was military rank (i.e., officer or enlisted). Because rank was not available in the dataset, educational attainment was used as a proxy. Rank may be an important determinant of Service members' career intentions given that officers are often granted more privileges, benefits, and career opportunities than enlisted personnel (Kirby & Naftel, 2000). Therefore, future examinations of determinants of Service members' career intentions may include rank as an additional predictor or control variable.

Path analysis allows for the examination of causal hypotheses and strength of relationships among variables. However, these relationships are correlational and cannot determine the direction of effects. Given this limitation, in addition to the use of cross-sectional data which restricts the ability to infer causality and change over time, future studies will benefit from the use of analyses that indicate the direction of effects among work-related factors, family-related factors, personal well-being, and career intentions among Service members.

This study may inform future research on retention. First, while this study focused on military career intentions specifically, the findings may be somewhat generalizable to the wider civilian population. The current study's results were concurrent with prior civilian literature (e.g., Odle-Dusseau et al., 2012) on retention. Furthermore, the personal choice model of military

retention was created based on civilian retention theories (Capon et al., 2007). Thus, future research may explore how work-related factors, family-related factors, and mental health work together to influence civilians' intentions to remain in or leave their current positions of employment. In addition, the results of this study highlight the importance of conducting comprehensive assessments of factors contributing to military career intentions. Future studies may account for holistic perspectives on determinants of career intentions. Lastly, some Soldiers who participated in the current study indicated that they were uncertain about their military career intentions. This subgroup may be of particular interest for future longitudinal examination of what work-related factors, family-related factors, and personal well-being may serve as a turning point for Service members' military career intentions.

Practical and Policy Implications

This study had important implications for policy and practice to enhance military retention. The first point of intervention lies within units, namely cultivating a support environment and maintaining morale. Soldiers' perceptions of support derived from their fellow unit members and unit leaders was an important contributor to their intentions to remain in the military, especially among National Guard and Reserve personnel. Increasing unit support is a multilevel process. Unit leaders may take action to create a more supportive work environment by showing concern and interest in the well-being of their subordinates. Military installations may also continue to organize community events to encourage social engagement among unit members and their families and build social support. However, it is important to acknowledge that installation-based events may be less relevant to National Guard and Reserve families, as they tend to be more widely geographically dispersed away from military installations.

Morale was another contributor to Soldiers' intentions to remain and intentions to leave. Importantly, morale served as a mediator for other determinants of career intentions (i.e., unit support, work-family balance, relationship quality, and depressive symptoms). Thus, targeting morale may be an important step to reduce the likelihood of leaving and increase the likelihood of staying in the military. Each branch of the military operates a Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) program that seeks to promote military readiness and retention through community and family activities. Service members' utilization of MWR services has been associated with improved satisfaction with military life, unit teamwork, and intentions to remain in the military (Marshall-Mies et al., 2011). Continued investment into these programs and encouragement of Service members to utilize their services may improve Service members' career intentions and thus retention.

In general, poorer work-family balance was associated with Soldiers' greater intentions to leave. Furthermore, work-family balance had important implications for Service members' depressive symptoms, another determinant of intentions to leave. These findings highlight that work-family balance-promoting policies may be a critical turning point for Service members who are considering leaving the military. More family-friendly work environments contribute to Service members' greater commitment to military service (Huffman et al., 2008). The Department of Defense may update or implement policies which promote work-family balance, such as shorter deployments, extended maternity or paternity leave, providing opportunities for remote work, and offering flexibility for work schedules (Wadsworth & Southwell, 2011).

Though greater romantic relationship quality demonstrated an unexpected association with lower intentions to remain, greater romantic relationship quality did indirectly contribute to greater intentions to remain and lower intentions to leave through less severe depressive

symptoms and greater morale. Thus, while relationship quality may not be an immediate priority for the promotion of retention, it may be useful to promote greater relationship quality alongside other determinants of military career intentions. Though improving one's relationship quality is largely the responsibility of the romantic partners, a variety of resources may help couples work together to increase relationship quality. Couples may also access evidence-based relationship interventions, such as the Mindfulness-based Relationship Enhancement intervention that has demonstrated positive effects on military couples' marital quality (Hinckley et al., 2020).

Another intervention, Prevention and Relationship Education Program (PREP) for Strong Bonds, which is delivered by Army chaplains, has demonstrated moderate success at improving communication and bonding among Army couples (Allen et al., 2011). Military unit leaders may also contribute to efforts to improve relationship quality among unit members and their families. In their randomized controlled trial including 250 Veterans in the civilian workforce, Brady et al. (2021) found that when work supervisors completed a supportive supervisor training to help employees ability to meet their marital needs, Veterans reported greater marital relationship quality. Future research may determine whether similar trainings conducted among military unit leaders may have similar effects on active-duty Service members' romantic relationship quality.

The final determinant of military career intentions examined in this study were Soldiers' depressive symptoms. Depressive symptoms worked to "push" active-duty Service members to consider leaving the military. A variety of mental health resources are available to Service members, such as formal services military medical treatment facilities, counseling through support organizations (e.g., Military One Source), and treatment from civilian providers. Referring Service members to these mental health resources serves two purposes: first, to improve the well-being of Service members struggling with mental health concerns; and second,

to promote retention by reducing the burden of poor mental health on Service members' commitment to military service. Unit leaders may play an important role in addressing Service members' mental health concerns by monitoring their subordinates for symptoms of depression and encouraging those Service members who are struggling to seek support.

Conclusion

Adapting the framework of the personal choice model of military retention (Capon et al., 2007) and family systems theory (Kerr & Bowen, 1988), this study was conducted to examine how work-related factors, family-related factors, and personal well-being contribute to Service members' military career intentions (i.e., research question one). Data from 3,506 Soldiers who participated in Army STARRS were pulled to examine associations among unit support, morale, work-family balance, romantic relationship quality, depressive symptoms, intentions to remain in military service beyond their current obligation, and intentions to leave the military before their current obligation ends if they had the option to do so. Path analysis was conducted to model the direct and indirect effects of unit support on intentions to remain and intentions to leave through depressive symptoms and morale (i.e., hypothesis one), and the direct and indirect effects of work-family balance on intentions to remain and intentions to leave through romantic relationship quality, depressive symptoms, and morale (i.e., hypothesis two). This study also sought to explore whether the contributions of work-related factors, family-related factors, and personal well-being differed among Active Component (i.e., active-duty) and Reserve Component (i.e., National Guard or Reserve) personnel (i.e., research question two). Multigroup moderation mediation was conducted to test Soldiers' duty status as a moderator of the initial path model. Results from the path analysis demonstrated significant direct and indirect effects of unit support and work-family balance on Soldiers' military career intentions. The moderation

analyses revealed few significant differences in the contributions of work-related factors, family-related factors, and personal well-being to military career intentions between active-duty and National Guard or Reserve Soldiers.

The results of this study are situated in the context of their limitations. These limitations include the use of secondary data, data only being sourced from a single military branch, and the use of education as a proxy for rank. Limitations also stem from using single-item measures of work-family balance, morale, intentions to remain, and intentions to leave. Lastly, relationships among variables were examined using path analysis, which does not allow for the determination of direction of effects among variables. Future research may expand upon the current study's findings by using primary source data, collecting data from multiple military branches, recording participating Service members' rank, using validated, multi-item measures that capture the complexity of study constructs, and conducting analyses that allow for the interpretation of the direction of effects among variables.

Despite these limitations, the results of this study inform opportunities to promote military retention through policy and resource development. Military unit leaders may benefit from trainings to create a supportive and family-friendly work environment and to recognize symptoms of depression to refer Service members to mental health resources. Resources provided through the DoD or support organizations also offer opportunities to increase morale (e.g., Morale, Welfare, and Recreation programs), romantic relationship quality (e.g., relationship education programs), and mental well-being (e.g., mental health treatment). Lastly, the DoD may reevaluate and update existing work-family policies (e.g., maternity and paternity leave, remote work opportunities) to facilitate work-family balance among Service members.

Together, these initiatives may work to support the DoD's goal to retain highly trained military personnel and promote Service member readiness.

References

- Allen, E. S., Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., Markman, H. J., & Loew, B. A. (2011). Marriage education in the army: Results of a randomized clinical trial. *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy, 10*(4), 309–326. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15332691.2011.613309>
- Anderson, B. K., Meyer, J. P., Goldenberg, I., & Laplante, J. (2022). Development and evolution of commitment profiles among military recruits: Implications for turnover intention and well-being. *Military Psychology*, Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08995605.2021.2022910>
- Andres, M., Moelker, R., & Soeters, J. (2012). The work–family interface and turnover intentions over the course of project-oriented assignments abroad. *International Journal of Project Management, 30*(7), 752–759. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2012.01.006>
- Armistead-Jehle, P., Johnston, S. L., Wade, N. G., & Ecklund, C. J. (2011). Posttraumatic stress in U.S. marines: The role of unit cohesion and combat exposure. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 89*(1), 81–88. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6678.2011.tb00063.x>
- Asch, B. J., Miller, T., & Malchiodi, A. (2012). *A new look at gender and minority differences in officer career progression in the military*. RAND NATIONAL DEFENSE RESEARCH INST SANTA MONICA CA. <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA562677>
- Association of the United States Army (AUSA). (2019). *Retaining soldiers through their families*. Association of the United States Army (AUSA). <https://www.ausa.org/news/retaining-soldiers-through-their-families>
- Borowski, S., Smith, B. N., McClendon, J., & Vogt, D. (2021). Work-family conflict and subsequent depressive symptoms among war-exposed post-9/11 U.S. military veterans.

- Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health*, 7(s1), 58–68.
<https://jmvfh.utpjournals.press/doi/full/10.3138/jmvfh-2021-0023>
- Bourg, C., & Segal, M. W. (1999). The impact of family supportive policies and practices on organizational commitment to the army. *Armed Forces & Society*, 25(4), 633.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X9902500406>
- Brady, J. M., Hammer, L. B., Mohr, C. D., & Bodner, T. E. (2021). Supportive supervisor training improves family relationships among employee and spouse dyads. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 26, 31–48. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ocp0000264>
- Britt, T. W., & Dickinson, J. M. (2006). Morale during military operations: A positive psychology approach. In *Military life: The psychology of serving in peace and combat: Military performance, Vol. 1* (pp. 157–184). Praeger Security International.
- Brooks, S. K., & Greenberg, N. (2018). Non-deployment factors affecting psychological wellbeing in military personnel: Literature review. *Journal of Mental Health*, 27(1), 80–90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638237.2016.1276536>
- Capon, J., Chernyshenko, O., & Stark, S. (2007). Applicability of civilian retention theory in the New Zealand military. *New Zealand Journal of Psychology*, 36(1), 50–56.
<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2007-06760-007>
- Carter, S. P., Loew, B., Allen, E. S., Osborne, L., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2015). Distraction during deployment: Marital relationship associations with spillover for deployed army soldiers. *Military Psychology*, 27(2), 108–114.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/mil0000067>

- Charbonneau, D., & Wood, V. M. (2018). Antecedents and outcomes of unit cohesion and affective commitment to the army. *Military Psychology, 30*(1), 43–53.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08995605.2017.1420974>
- Cho, S., Johanson, M. M., & Guchait, P. (2009). Employees intent to leave: A comparison of determinants of intent to leave versus intent to stay. *International Journal of Hospitality Management, 28*(3), 374–381. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2008.10.007>
- Clark, S. C. (2000). Work/family border theory: A new theory of work/family balance. *Human Relations, 53*(6), 747–770. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726700536001>
- Cohen, G., Blake, R. S., & Goodman, D. (2016). Does turnover intention matter? Evaluating the usefulness of turnover intention rate as a predictor of actual turnover rate. *Review of Public Personnel Administration, 36*(3), 240–263.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X15581850>
- Eby, L. T., Casper, W. J., Lockwood, A., Bordeaux, C., & Brinley, A. (2005). Work and family research in IO/OB: Content analysis and review of the literature (1980-2002). *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 66*(1), 124–197. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2003.11.003>
- Fugita, S. S., & Lakhani, H. A. (1991). *The economic and noneconomic determinants of retention in the reserve/ guard units*. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences. <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA240750>
- Greenhaus, J. H., Collins, K. M., & Shaw, J. D. (2003). The relation between work–family balance and quality of life. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 63*(3), 510–531.
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0001-8791\(02\)00042-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0001-8791(02)00042-8)

- Griffith, J. (2008). Institutional motives for serving in the U.S. army national guard: Implications for recruitment, retention, and readiness. *Armed Forces & Society, 34*(2), 230–258. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X06293864>
- Griffith, J. (2015). Homecoming of soldiers who are citizens: Re-employment and financial status of returning army national guard soldiers from operations iraqi freedom (OIF) and enduring freedom (OEF). *Work, 50*(1), 85–96. <https://doi.org/10.3233/WOR-131794>
- Haskell, S. G., Gordon, K. S., Mattocks, K., Duggal, M., Erdos, J., Justice, A., & Brandt, C. A. (2010). Gender differences in rates of depression, PTSD, pain, obesity, and military sexual trauma among Connecticut war veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan. *Journal of Women's Health, 19*(2), 267–271. <https://doi.org/10.1089/jwh.2008.1262>
- Hattke, F., Vogel, R., & Znanewitz, J. (2018). Satisfied with red tape? Leadership, civic duty, and career intention in the military. *Public Management Review, 20*(4), 563–586. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2017.1335341>
- Heilmann, S. G., Bell, J. E., & McDonald, G. K. (2009). Work—home conflict: A study of the effects of role conflict on military officer turnover intention. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, 16*(1), 85–96. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051809334194>
- Hinckley, E., Favorite, T., Nickelsen, T., & King, A. (2020). Effects on marital satisfaction and resting state functional connectivity in default mode network (DMN): A pilot study of a mindfulness- and loving-kindness meditation- based group couples relationship enhancement (MBRE) intervention for military veterans and spouses. *Biological Psychiatry, 87*(9), S390. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biopsych.2020.02.998>

- Hu, L., & Bentler, P. M. (1999). Cutoff criteria for fit indexes in covariance structure analysis: Conventional criteria versus new alternatives. *Structural Equation Modeling: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 6(1), 1–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705519909540118>
- Huffman, A. H., Culbertson, S. S., & Castro, C. A. (2008). Family-friendly environments and U.S. army soldier performance and work outcomes. *Military Psychology*, 20(4), 253–270. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08995600802345162>
- Ireland, R. R., Kress, A. M., & Frost, L. Z. (2012). Association between mental health conditions diagnosed during initial eligibility for military health care benefits and subsequent deployment, attrition, and death by suicide among active duty service members. *Military Medicine*, 177(10), 1149–1156. <https://doi.org/10.7205/MILMED-D-12-00051>
- Ivey, G. W., Blanc, J.-R. S., & Mantler, J. (2015). An assessment of the overlap between morale and work engagement in a nonoperational military sample. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 20(3), 338–347. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038559>
- Kapp, L. (2013). *Recruiting and retention: An overview of FY2011 and FY2012 results for active and reserve component enlisted personnel* (No. RL32965). Congressional Research Service. <https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc821918/>
- Kapp, L., & Torreon, B. S. (2021). *Reserve component personnel issues: Questions and answers* (No. RL30802). Congressional Research Service. <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/natsec/RL30802.pdf>
- Kelley, M. L., Hock, E., Bonney, J. F., Jarvis, M. S., Smith, K. M., & Gaffney, M. A. (2001). Navy mothers experiencing and not experiencing deployment: Reasons for staying in or leaving the military. *Military Psychology*, 13(1), 55–71. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327876MP1301_04

- Kerr, M. E., & Bowen, M. (1988). *Family evaluation: An approach based on Bowen theory* (pp. xii, 400). W W Norton & Co.
- Kessler, R. C., Santiago, P. N., Colpe, L. J., Dempsey, C. L., First, M. B., Heeringa, S. G., Stein, M. B., Fullerton, C. S., Gruber, M. J., Naifeh, J. A., Nock, M. K., Sampson, N. A., Schoenbaum, M., Zaslavsky, A. M., & Ursano, R. J. (2013). Clinical reappraisal of the composite international diagnostic interview screening scales (CIDI-SC) in the army study to assess risk and resilience in servicemembers (Army STARRS). *International Journal of Methods in Psychiatric Research*, 22(4), 303–321.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/mpr.1398>
- King, E. L., DiNitto, D., Salas-Wright, C., & Snowden, D. (2020). Retaining women air force officers: Work, family, career satisfaction, and intentions. *Armed Forces & Society*, 46(4), 677–695. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X19845024>
- Kirby, S. N., & Naftel, S. (2000). The impact of deployment on the retention of military reservists. *Armed Forces & Society*, 26(2), 259–284.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X0002600205>
- Kline, R. B. (2011). *Principles and practice of structural equation modeling* (3rd ed.). Guilford Press. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2010-18801-000>
- Kritikos, T. K., DeVoe, E. R., & Emmert-Aronson, B. (2019). The effect of a parenting intervention on relationship quality of recently deployed military service members and their partners. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 89(2), 170–180.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000344>
- Lancaster, S. L., Erbes, C. R., Kumpula, M. J., Ferrier-Auerbach, A., Arbisi, P. A., & Polusny, M. A. (2013). Longitudinal predictors of desire to re-enlist in the military among male

- and female national guard soldiers. *Military Medicine*, 178(3), 267–273.
<https://doi.org/10.7205/MILMED-D-12-00147>
- Langkamer, K. L., & Ervin, K. S. (2008). Psychological climate, organizational commitment and morale: Implications for army captains' career intent. *Military Psychology*, 20(4), 219–236. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08995600802345113>
- Lee, M.-A., Ju, Y.-H., & Lim, S.-H. (2020). A study on the intent to leave and stay among hospital nurses in Korea: A cross-sectional survey. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 28(2), 332–341. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jonm.12929>
- Long, K. E. (2022). *Married to the military: An examination of work-family conflict and marital quality among United States reserve service members* [Psy.D., The Institute for the Psychological Sciences].
<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2627461572/abstract/A6E6E3234626476APQ/1>
- Manning, F. J. (1991). Morale, cohesion, and esprit de corps. In *Handbook of military psychology* (pp. 453–470). John Wiley & Sons.
- Marshall-Mies, J., Westhuis, D., & Fafara, R. (2011). *US army morale, welfare and recreation (MWR) programmes: Links to readiness and retention*. Swan Research, Inc.
<https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA554038>
- Matsch, M. A., Sachau, D. A., Gertz, J., & Englert, D. R. (2009). Perceptions of work-life balance among military law enforcement personnel and their spouses. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 24(2), 113–119. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-009-9046-y>
- Members: Required Service, 10 U.S.C. § 651 (2010).
<https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/USCODE-2010-title10/USCODE-2010-title10-subtitleA-partII-chap37-sec651>

- Meyer, J. P., Kam, C., Goldenberg, I., & Bremner, N. L. (2013). Organizational commitment in the military: Application of a profile approach. *Military Psychology, 25*(4), 381–401.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/mil0000007>
- Milligan, P. K. (2004). The impact of trust in leadership on officer commitment and intention to leave military service in the United States air force [Ph.D., Capella University]. In *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*.
<https://www.proquest.com/docview/305058108/abstract/19D87166B43E4480PQ/1>
- Moelker, R., Andres, M., Bowen, G., & Manigart, P. (2015). *Military families and war in the 21st century: Comparative perspectives*. Routledge.
- Motowidlo, S. J., & Borman, W. C. (1978). Relationships between military morale, motivation, satisfaction, and unit effectiveness. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 63*(1), 47–52.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.63.1.47>
- Motowidlo, S. J., & Lawton, G. W. (1984). Affective and cognitive factors in soldiers' reenlistment decisions. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 69*(1), 157–166.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.69.1.157>
- Nannarow, S., Bradbury, J., Pit, S. W., & Ariss, S. (2014). Intention to stay and intention to leave: Are they two sides of the same coin? A cross-sectional structural equation modelling study among health and social care workers. *Journal of Occupational Health, 56*(4), 292–300. <https://doi.org/10.1539/joh.14-0027-OA>
- Odle-Dusseau, H. N., Britt, T. W., & Bobko, P. (2012). Work–family balance, well-being, and organizational outcomes: Investigating actual versus desired work/family time discrepancies. *Journal of Business and Psychology, 27*(3), 331–343.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-011-9246-1>

- Porter, B., Carey, F. R., Roenfeldt, K. A., Rull, R. P., & Castro, C. A. (2022). A temporal analysis of mental health symptoms relative to separation from the military. *Depression and Anxiety, 39*(4), 334–343. <https://doi.org/10.1002/da.23246>
- Purpose of Reserve Components, 10 U.S.C. § 10102 (2011).
<https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/USCODE-2011-title10/USCODE-2011-title10-subtitleE-partI-chap1003-sec10102>
- Randall, E. W. (2006). Military leadership: The effect of leader behavior on soldier retention in the army national guard [Ph.D., Capella University]. In *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/304909197/abstract/2982E912F9B40B1PQ/1>
- Reed-Fitzke, K., & Lucier-Greer, M. (2020). The buffering effect of relationships on combat exposure, military performance, and mental health of U.S. military soldiers: A vantage point for CFTs. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 46*(2), 321–336.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jmft.12402>
- Rosen, L. N., Knudson, K. H., & Fancher, P. (2003). Cohesion and the culture of hypermasculinity in U.S. army units. *Armed Forces & Society, 29*(3), 325–351.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X0302900302>
- Sachau, D. A., Gertz, J., Matsch, M., Palmer, A. J., & Englert, D. (2012). Work-life conflict and organizational support in a military law enforcement agency. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology, 27*(1), 63–72. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-011-9095-x>
- Sanchez, R. P., Bray, R. M., Vincus, A. A., & Bann, C. M. (2004). Predictors of job satisfaction among active duty and reserve/guard personnel in the U.S. military. *Military Psychology, 16*(1), 19–35. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327876mp1601_2

- Schuh, A. L., Kees, M., Blow, A., & Gorman, L. (2016). The special case of civilian service members: Supporting parents in the National Guard and Reserves. In A. H. Gewirtz & A. M. Youssef (Eds.), *Parenting and Children's Resilience in Military Families* (pp. 93–107). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-12556-5_6
- Schultz, D. P., & Schultz, S. E. (1986). *Psychology and industry today: An introduction to industrial and organizational psychology* (4th ed). Macmillan.
- Schumm, W. R., & Bell, D. B. (2000). Soldiers at risk for individual readiness or morale problems during a six-month peacekeeping deployment to the Sinai. *Psychological Reports, 87*(2), 623–633. <https://doi.org/10.2466/pr0.2000.87.2.623>
- Schumm, W. R., Bell, D. B., & Resnick, G. (2001). Recent research on family factors and readiness: Implications for military leaders. *Psychological Reports, 89*(1), 153–165. <https://doi.org/10.2466/pr0.2001.89.1.153>
- Segal, M. W. (1986). The military and the family as greedy institutions. *Armed Forces & Society, 13*(1), 9–38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X8601300101>
- Smith, D. G., & Rosenstein, J. E. (2017). Gender and the military profession: Early career influences, attitudes, and intentions. *Armed Forces & Society, 43*(2), 260–279. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X15626722>
- Squires, E. C., & Peach, J. M. (2020). Effective military leadership: Balancing competing demands. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science / Revue Canadienne Des Sciences Du Comportement, 52*(4), 314–323. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cbs0000179>
- Tremble, T. R., Payne, S. C., Finch, J. F., & Bullis, R. C. (2003). Opening organizational archives to research: Analog measures of organizational commitment. *Military Psychology, 15*(3), 167–190. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327876MP1503_02

- Tucker, J. S., Sinclair, R. R., & Thomas, J. L. (2005). The multilevel effects of occupational stressors on soldiers' well-being, organizational attachment, and readiness. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 10*(3), 276–299. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-8998.10.3.276>
- Upadhyay, D., & Gupta, A. (2012). Morale, welfare measures, job satisfaction: The key mantras for gaining competitive edge. *International Journal of Physical and Social Sciences, 2*(7), 80–94. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Morale%2C-welfare-measures%2C-job-satisfaction%3A-the-key-Upadhyay-Gupta/4f6a5f0a8f640936095438016220d60c7fa646a1>
- Vanderpool, C., & Way, S. A. (2013). Investigating work–family balance, job anxiety, and turnover intentions as predictors of health care and senior services customer-contact employee voluntary turnover. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly, 54*(2), 149–160. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1938965513478682>
- Vasterling, J. J., Proctor, S. P., Aslan, M., Ko, J., Jakupcak, M., Harte, C. B., Marx, B. P., & Concato, J. (2015). Military, demographic, and psychosocial predictors of military retention in enlisted army soldiers 12 months after deployment to Iraq. *Military Medicine, 180*(5), 524–532. <https://doi.org/10.7205/MILMED-D-14-00468>
- Wadsworth, S. M., & Southwell, K. (2011). Military families: Extreme work and extreme “work-family.” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 638*(1), 163–183. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716211416445>
- Waruszynski, B. T., MacEachern, K. H., Raby, S., Straver, M., & Ouellet, E. (2022). Desire to serve: Insights from Canadian defence studies on the factors that influence women to

- pursue a military career. *Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health*, 8(1), 75–84.
<https://doi.org/10.3138/jmvfh-2021-0089>
- Watanabe, M., & Falci, C. D. (2016). A demands and resources approach to understanding faculty turnover intentions due to work–family balance. *Journal of Family Issues*, 37(3), 393–415. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X14530972>
- Welsh, J. A., Olson, J. R., & Perkins, D. F. (2019). Gender differences in post-deployment adjustment of air force personnel: The role of wartime experiences, unit cohesion, and self-efficacy. *Military Medicine*, 184(1–2), e229–e234.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/milmed/usy261>
- Wilcove, G. L., Schwerin, M. J., & Wolosin, D. G. (2003). An exploratory model of quality of life in the U.S. navy. *Military Psychology*, 15(2), 133–152.
https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327876MP1502_3
- Williams, A., Hagerty, B. M., Yousha, S. M., Horrocks, J., Hoyle, K. S., & Liu, D. (2004). Psychosocial effects of the boot strap intervention in navy recruits. *Military Medicine*, 169(10), 814–820. <https://doi.org/10.7205/MILMED.169.10.814>
- Williams, J., Brown, J. M., Bray, R. M., Anderson Goodell, E. M., Rae Olmsted, K., & Adler, A. B. (2016). Unit cohesion, resilience, and mental health of soldiers in basic combat training. *Military Psychology*, 28(4), 241–250. <https://doi.org/10.1037/mil0000120>
- Woodall, K. A., Richardson, S. M., Pflieger, J. C., Hawkins, S. A., & Stander, V. A. (2020). Influence of work and life stressors on marital quality among dual and nondual military couples. *Journal of Family Issues*, 41(11), 2045–2064.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X20903377>

Wright, P. J., Kim, P. Y., Wilk, J. E., & Thomas, J. L. (2012). The effects of mental health symptoms and organizational climate on intent to leave the military among combat veterans. *Military Medicine*, *177*(7), 773–779. <https://doi.org/10.7205/MILMED-D-11-00403>

Zarei, S. (2019). Mediating role of job involvement in the relationship between work- family conflict and perceived organizational support with turnover Intention among military personnel. *Counseling Culture and Psychotherapy*, *10*(37), 171–198. <https://doi.org/10.22054/qccpc.2019.35350.1949>

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Unit Support	1													
2. Morale	0.560***	1												
3. Work-family Balance	0.232***	0.391***	1											
4. Relationship Quality	0.172***	0.204***	0.280***	1										
5. Depressive symptoms	-0.315***	-0.457***	-0.411***	-0.268***	1									
6. Intentions to Remain	0.238***	0.301***	0.120***	0.015	-0.140***	1								
7. Intentions to Leave	-0.298***	-0.364***	-0.202***	-0.089***	0.238***	-0.541***	1							
8. NG/R	-0.017	0.077***	0.110***	0.027	-0.072***	0.033	-0.030	1						
9. Age	0.064***	0.154***	0.033*	0.010	-0.024	0.373***	-0.215***	0.087***	1					
10. Women	-0.106***	-0.068***	-0.010	-0.027	0.098***	-0.045**	0.019	-0.002	-0.094***	1				
11. White	0.059**	-0.025	-0.012	0.144***	-0.005	-0.063***	0.001	0.057**	-0.024	-0.101***	1			
12. Black	-0.089***	0.005	0.018	-0.140***	0.003	0.036*	0.000	-0.045**	0.024	0.124***	-0.694***	1		
13. Education	0.088***	0.162***	0.038*	0.039*	-0.037*	0.174***	-0.135***	0.020	0.419***	0.071***	0.038*	-0.005	1	
14. Deployment History	0.016	0.033*	-0.005	0.002	0.029	0.265***	-0.103***	0.021	0.452***	-0.163***	0.063***	-0.069***	0.126***	1
N	3,474	3,478	3,463	3,506	3,482	3,506	3,506	3,506	3,495	3,499	3,442	3,442	3,460	3,474
Mean	3.679	3.340	3.232	5.003	1.504	2.420	2.337	0.153	30.446	0.125	0.733	0.168	3.673	3.439
Standard Deviation	1.009	1.079	0.767	1.047	0.769	0.810	1.337	0.361	7.896	0.330	0.443	0.374	1.731	2.728
Alphas	0.909	-	-	0.805	0.931	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Range	1-5	1-5	1-4	1-6	1-5	1-3	1-5	0-1	18-61	0-1	0-1	0-1	1-7	0-15
Skewness	-0.656	-0.321	-0.833	-1.424	2.104	-0.906	0.665	1.926	0.843	2.273	1.052	-1.780	0.453	0.794

Note. * = $p > .05$, ** = $p > .01$, *** = $p > .001$. NG/R = National Guard and Reserve member (1) or Active Duty member (0).

Table 2

Direct Effects Within Multiple Mediation Path Analysis

Direct Effects	Coefficients			Intercepts			Residual Variances			R^2 Estimate (se)
	Estimate (se)	95% CI		Estimate (se)	95% CI		Estimate (se)	95% CI		
Remain										
Leave				0.885 (0.142)	[0.651, 1.119]		0.774 (0.012)***	[0.753, 0.794]		0.226 (0.012)***
				3.623 (0.140)	[3.392, 3.854]		0.829 (0.011)***	[0.810, 0.847]		0.171 (0.011)***
Unit Support				3.336 (0.074)	[3.214, 3.458]		0.974 (0.005)***	[0.965, 0.983]		0.026 (0.005)***
Depressive Symptoms	-0.214 (0.016)***	[-0.241, -0.188]								
Morale	0.449 (0.013)***	[0.427, 0.471]								
Remain	0.117 (0.019)***	[0.086, 0.147]								
Leave	-0.135 (0.019)***	[-0.166, -0.103]								
Morale				0.716 (0.108)	[0.538, 0.893]		0.586 (0.012)***	[0.566, 0.606]		0.414 (0.012)***
Remain	0.172 (0.020)***	[0.140, 0.205]								
Leave	-0.208 (0.020)***	[-0.241, -0.174]								
WkFamBal				4.143 (0.066)	[4.033, 4.252]		0.999 (0.001)***	[0.997, 1.001]		0.001 (0.001)
Relationship Quality	0.284 (0.016)***	[0.258, 0.310]								
Depress	-0.321 (0.016)***	[-0.347, -0.295]								
Morale	0.195 (0.015)***	[0.170, 0.219]								
Remain	0.020 (0.018)	[-0.009, 0.049]								
Leave	-0.058 (0.018)***	[-0.088, -0.028]								
Relationship Quality				3.463 (0.115)	[3.274, 3.651]		0.895 (0.010)***	[0.878, 0.911]		0.105 (0.010)***
Depress	-0.149 (0.016)***	[-0.176, -0.123]								
Remain	-0.046 (0.016)***	[-0.073, -0.019]								
Leave	0.014 (0.017)	[-0.013, 0.042]								
Depress				4.829 (0.085)	[4.960, 4.969]		0.792 (0.011)***	[0.773, 0.811]		0.208 (0.011)***
Morale	-0.242 (0.015)***	[-0.266, -0.218]								
Remain	-0.022 (0.018)	[-0.051, 0.007]								
Leave	0.077 (0.018)***	[0.047, 0.107]								

Note. Standardized coefficients are reported. $\chi^2 = 267.752$, $df=32$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.960; TLI = 0.922; RMSEA = 0.047). This model accounted for Soldiers' age, gender, white/black race, education, and deployment history. Intentions to remain covaried with intentions to leave. * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 3

Indirect Effects Within Multiple Mediation Path Analysis

	Estimate (se)	95% CI
Indirect Effects		
Unit Support		
<i>Unit Support to Remain</i>		
Total	0.207 (0.016)***	[0.181, 0.233]
Total Indirect	0.091 (0.010)***	[0.075, 0.107]
Unit Support – Morale – Remain	0.077 (0.009)***	[0.062, 0.092]
Unit Support – Depress – Remain	0.005 (0.004)	[-0.002, 0.011]
Unit Support – Depress – Morale – Remain	0.009 (0.001)***	[0.007, 0.011]
<i>Unit Support to Leave</i>		
Total	-0.255 (0.016)***	[-0.282, -0.228]
Total Indirect	-0.120 (0.010)***	[-0.138, -0.103]
Unit Support – Morale – Leave	-0.093 (0.010)***	[-0.109, -0.077]
Unit Support – Depress – Leave	-0.017 (0.004)***	[-0.023, -0.010]
Unit Support – Depress – Morale – Leave	-0.011 (0.001)***	[-0.013, -0.008]
Work-family balance		
<i>Work-family balance to Remain</i>		
Total	0.064 (0.016)***	[0.037, 0.090]
Total Indirect	0.044 (0.005)***	[0.030, 0.058]
Work-family balance – Morale – Remain	0.034 (0.005)***	[0.026, 0.041]
Work-family balance – Relationship Quality – Remain	-0.013 (0.005)**	[-0.021, -0.005]
Work-family balance – Depressive Symptoms – Remain	0.007 (0.006)	[-0.002, 0.016]
Work-family balance – Depressive Symptoms – Morale – Remain	0.013 (0.002)***	[0.010, 0.016]
Work-family balance – Relationship Quality – Depressive Symptoms – Remain	0.001 (0.001)	[0.000, 0.002]
Work-family balance – Relationship Quality – Depressive Symptoms – Morale – Remain	0.002 (0.000)***	[0.001, 0.002]
<i>Work-family balance to Leave</i>		
Total	-0.141 (0.017)***	[-0.168, -0.141]
Total Indirect	-0.083 (0.009)***	[-0.090, -0.068]
Work-family balance – Morale – Leave	-0.040 (0.005)***	[-0.049, -0.032]
Work-family balance – Relationship Quality – Leave	0.004 (0.005)	[-0.004, 0.012]
Work-family balance – Depressive Symptoms – Leave	-0.025 (0.006)***	[-0.035, -0.015]
Work-family balance – Depressive Symptoms – Morale – Leave	-0.016 (0.002)***	[-0.019, -0.013]
Work-family balance – Relationship Quality – Depressive Symptoms – Leave	-0.003 (0.001)***	[-0.005, -0.002]
Work-family balance – Relationship Quality – Depressive Symptoms – Morale – Leave	-0.002 (0.000)***	[-0.003, -0.002]

Note. Standardized coefficients are reported. $\chi^2 = 267.752$, $df=32$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.960; TLI = 0.922; RMSEA = 0.047. This model accounted for Soldiers' age, gender, white/black race, education, and deployment history. Intentions to remain covaried with intentions to leave. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

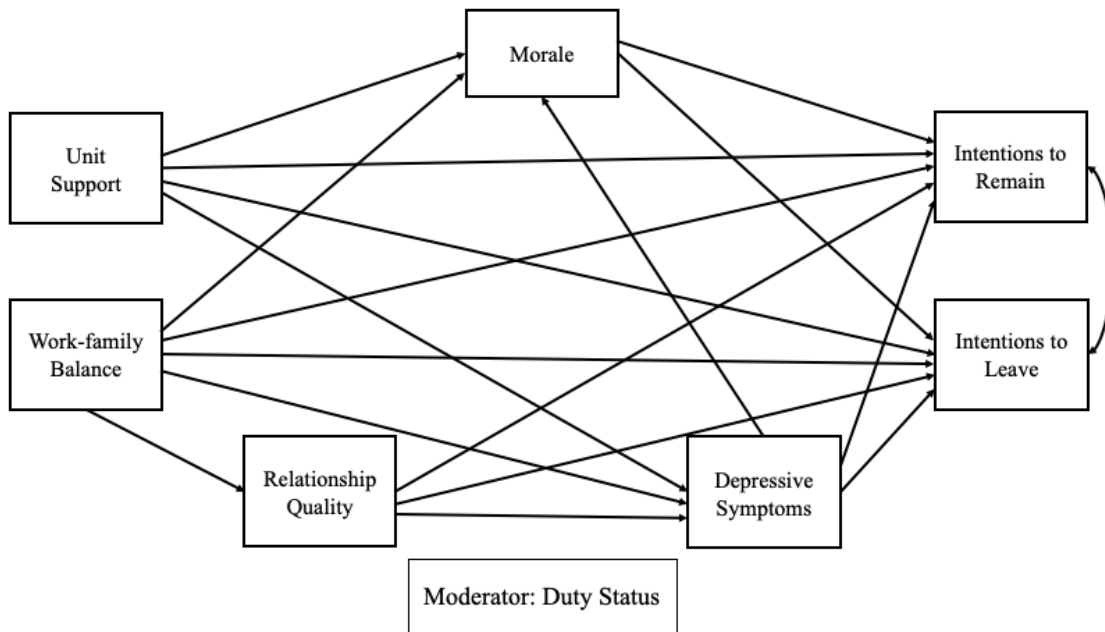
Table 4

Multigroup Path Analysis Based on Soldiers' Duty Status

Path	χ^2 for unconstrained and constrained paths					χ^2 difference test			Moderation Effects		
	Constrained		Unconstrained			$\Delta \chi^2$	Δdf	P	Active Duty		
	χ^2	df	χ^2	df	Estimate (β) (se)				95% CI	National Guard or Reserve Estimate (β) (se)	95% CI
Overall Model	374.121***	94	313.35***	64	60.771	30	0.001	-	-	-	-
Intentions to Remain											
on Work-family balance	374.121***	94	374.092***	93	0.029	1	0.865	0.020*** (0.019)	[-0.009, 0.050]	0.018 (0.016)	[-0.008, 0.045]
on Unit support	374.121***	94	368.052***	93	6.069	1	0.014	0.102*** (0.020)	[0.070, 0.135]	0.193*** (0.034)	[0.137, 0.250]
on Relationship quality	374.121***	94	370.733***	93	3.388	1	0.066	-0.056** (0.017)	[-0.085, -0.027]	0.011 (0.034)	[-0.046, 0.068]
on Depressive symptoms	374.121***	94	373.253***	93	0.868	1	0.351	-0.018 (0.019)	[-0.049, 0.013]	-0.049 (0.036)	[-0.108, 0.010]
on Morale	374.121***	94	374.098***	93	0.023	1	0.879	0.170*** (0.020)	[0.136, 0.203]	0.176*** (0.036)	[0.117, 0.236]
Intentions to Leave											
on Work-family balance	374.121***	94	372.224***	93	1.897	1	0.168	-0.066** (0.019)	[-0.098, -0.035]	-0.010 (0.037)	[-0.071, 0.050]
on Unit support	374.121***	94	373.543***	93	0.578	1	0.447	-0.140*** (0.020)	[-0.173, -0.107]	-0.123** (0.038)	[-0.186, -0.061]
on Relationship quality	374.121***	94	371.795***	93	2.326	1	0.127	0.005 (0.018)	[-0.024, 0.034]	0.064 (0.036)	[0.004, 0.123]
on Depressive symptoms	374.121***	94	370.512***	93	3.609	1	0.057	0.087*** (0.019)	[0.055, 0.119]	0.002 (0.038)	[-0.061, 0.065]
on Morale	374.121***	94	370.352***	93	3.769	1	0.052	-0.215*** (0.021)	[-0.249, -0.181]	-0.156*** (0.039)	[-0.220, -0.091]
Morale											
on Work-family balance	374.121***	94	372.821***	93	1.300	1	0.254	0.199*** (0.016)	[0.173, 0.226]	0.137*** (0.034)	[0.080, 0.194]
on Unit support	374.121***	94	374.068***	93	0.053	1	0.823	0.452*** (0.014)	[0.428, 0.475]	0.457*** (0.030)	[0.407, 0.507]
on Depressive symptoms	374.121***	94	371.444***	93	2.677	1	0.102	-0.246*** (0.015)	[-0.270, -0.221]	-0.197*** (0.014)	[-0.219, -0.179]
Depressive Symptoms											
on Work-family balance	374.121***	94	367.845***	93	6.279	1	0.012	-0.325*** (0.017)	[-0.353, -0.297]	-0.260*** (0.038)	[-0.323, -0.197]
on Unit support	374.121***	94	369.072***	93	5.049	1	0.025	-0.224*** (0.017)	[-0.253, -0.196]	-0.188*** (0.039)	[-0.253, -0.124]
on Relationship quality	374.121***	94	373.339***	93	0.782	1	0.377	-0.153*** (0.017)	[-0.181, -0.124]	-0.150*** (0.038)	[-0.213, -0.087]
Relationship Quality											
on Work-family balance	374.121***	94	374.071***	93	0.050	1	0.823	0.286*** (0.017)	[0.258, 0.314]	0.266*** (0.041)	[0.198, 0.333]

Figure 1

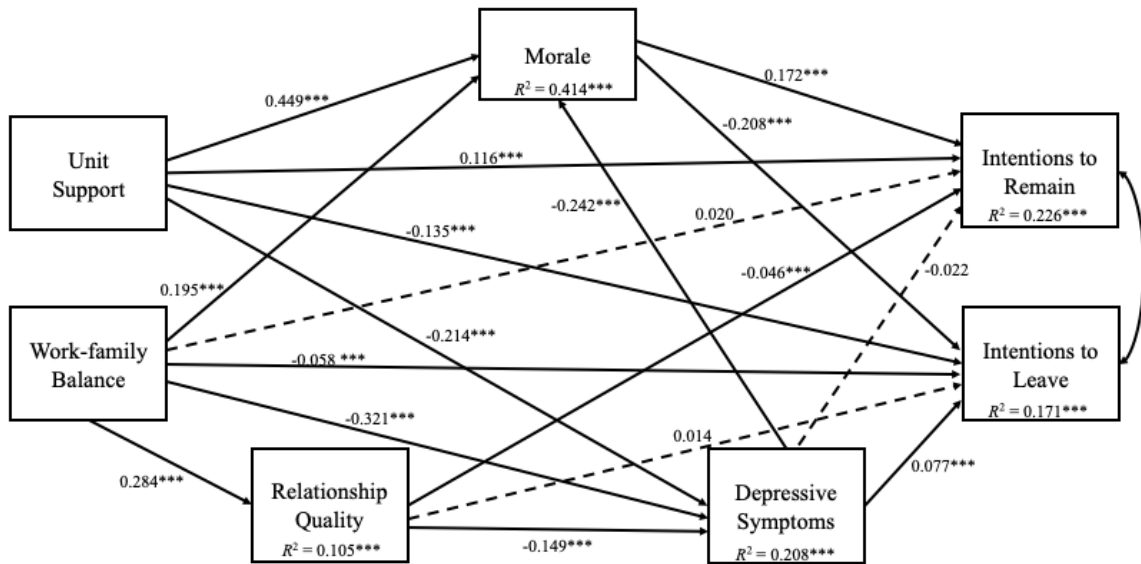
Conceptual Model



Note. This model accounted for Soldiers' age, gender, white/black race, education and deployment history.

Figure 2

Multiple Mediation Path Analysis of Associations Among Work-related Factors, Family-related Factors, and Personal Well-being on Soldiers' Intentions to Remain and Intentions to Leave the Military



Note. Standardized path coefficients are reported. $\chi^2 = 267.752$, $df = 32$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.960; TLI = 0.922; RMSEA = 0.047. This model accounted for Soldiers' age, gender, white/black race, education and deployment history (see text). * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** = $p < 0.001$.