



AFF Survey March 2008

Retention Issues from the Family's Perspective

This survey was conducted between 6 and 14 March 2008 to establish to the current mood of families with regard to soldiers' decisions to stay in or leave the Army. During this period all AFF staff and volunteers in the UK, Germany, Cyprus and Northern Ireland asked families the questions below. The questions were also sent to members of AFF's Facebook group. A total of 468 responses were received. The results therefore provide a representative sample of the views of spouses, ie the married community. However, there is no representation from the significant unmarried section of the community (girlfriends and boyfriends), nor from parents, who would also have an influence over a soldier's career decisions.

1. How long have you been an Army spouse?

This question was asked to determine whether there was an association between the length of time someone had been married and their attitudes towards Army life. Responses ranged from 25 years through to one year, with an average of 4 years.

Analysis of the relationship between number of years as an Army spouse and attitudes towards Army life (all respondents):

Years as Army Spouse	Better	Worse	As expected
1-5	31%	42%	27%
6-10	29%	35%	35%
11-15	33%	20%	47%
16 - 25	39%	14%	46%

length of marriage counts for how you feel - you don't necessarily get used to it

2. Is Army life better or worse than you expected

Of all respondents 50% of spouses said that Army life was better than they expected; 37% said that it was worse, and the remainder said it was just as they expected.

The 46 responses received via Facebook were analysed together and included in the statistics above. However, separate analysis shows that 15% said that Army life was better than expected, 50% said that it was worse, and 30% said that it was just as they expected.

However, comments given indicate that attitudes change due to individual circumstances or the tempo of the Army's commitments:

NB: Where percentages do not add up to 100%, respondents ticked two boxes (eg Is Army life better or worse than you expected - sometimes better, sometimes worse)

has got harder the older I get - I want to settle and put down roots

my outlook on army life has changed since I had the children - it's not family orientated

the army isn't how it used to be - there is a disagreement politically with how I feel about the current operations

it was better to start with, but when faced with a late posting and all the uncertainty that goes with moving to somewhere where there is no army housing and all the nonsense that brings with it, much worse also being posted to a TA unit where there is no support

I am fed up of having so little consideration for me and also for my husband who is continually worked to the point of exhaustion.

I hate the fact that the Army is incapable of planning properly. They give you a date for them going off on exercise/tour but it is never kept to.

One did say she thought it was worse to begin with but now she has been married for almost 5 years it is better as she is now aware of the help she can get

3. Would you feel happier if your spouse chose to leave the Army?

52% of spouses answered 'no' to this question, and they commented that they were happy to support their soldier in his chosen career. They also stated that they valued the financial security offered by the Army, and some had left the Army and then signed back up. However, 46% said they would be happier if their spouse was not in the Army. The less satisfied respondents made comments such as:

I would love my husband to leave if I was confident of his future job prospects

I don't want him to leave, but I'm not going to accompany him

Only 2% of respondents said they didn't mind either way.

4. Which aspect of Army life would make you want your spouse to leave the Army?

We asked respondents to indicate which of the following aspects would influence their decision. These categories were based on responses given in previous research (December 07 to February 08). However, respondents commented that increasing deployment frequency and length would be a deciding factor as well.

housing	20%
children's education	26%
your education	4%
your career/employment	19%
your relationship with your spouse	31%

NB: Where percentages do not add up to 100%, respondents ticked two boxes (eg Is Army life better or worse than you expected - sometimes better, sometimes worse)

Comments pertinent to this question included:

Bad housing may not be the one factor that drives us out of the Army - but good housing would go a long way to keeping us in.

No aspect of army life would make me want him to leave the army. I have enjoyed my time as a wife and other than monetary problems have never had any concerns. Have always managed to get the school I want and even have a daughter at boarding school. We have now settled into our own house and are looking forward to the next chapter.

I think the frequency and duration of tours puts undue pressure on relationships and family life.