REPORT OF FINDINGS
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MILITARY SPOUSE JD NETWORK
2014-2015 MEMBER SURVEY
INTRODUCTION

About MSJDN

The Military Spouse JD Network (“MSJDN”) is a bar association for military spouse attorneys (“MSAs”). MSJDN members include men and women building careers in the legal profession while also serving their country with a spouse or partner in the United States Uniformed Services. Formed in 2011, MSJDN’s mission is to improve the lives of military families by empowering military spouses through advocacy, professional networking, and job opportunities. The organization’s roughly 500 members come from active duty, guard, and reserve units in all branches of the Armed Services. MSJDN also includes members who are veterans and/or are married to veterans of the Armed Services.

Purpose

In July 2013, the MSJDN Board of Directors voted to develop an annual survey to collect data about its members for use in official reports and to inform a number of the initiatives in which MSJDN anticipates participating in the coming years. The survey collected information in the following categories:

- Information about the military service affiliation represented among members
- Information about the branches of service, length of service, and military careers represented among members and their spouses and partners
- Information about members’ family composition, frequency of moves, and stints serving as remote families
- Information about members’ careers, including duration, type of practice, and how military service may have impacted careers
- Information about factors impacting member careers, including service, licensing issues, and student loans.

Methodology

The MSJDN Member Survey was developed and approved by the MSJDN Board of Directors. The survey opened on December 15, 2014 and was published to members via email and social media. The survey ran from December 15, 2014 to January 19, 2015. The survey was further advertised internally and publicly during the three-week period it was open. Two hundred and twenty five (225) individuals participated in the survey. Although predominantly a member survey, MSJDN permitted any MSA to participate, regardless of membership. Figures and percentages included in the following findings and tables may not necessarily add up to 100% due to rounding and the number of respondents for each question (responses were not mandatory).

MSJDN volunteers compiled results for this report, and MSJDN leadership had an opportunity to review the report for accuracy prior to publication.
**REPORT FINDINGS**

The findings of the Member Survey fell generally into two broad categories: (1) information about MSJDN’s composition as an organization; and (2) information about MSJDN’s individual members.

I. **MSJDN Composition**

As an organization, MSJDN is predominantly composed of women. Ninety-six percent of members are women, while approximately 3.5% are men and 0.5% are transgender. These numbers fall generally in line with Department of Defense statistics concerning its own composition. MSJDN is a four-year-old bar association, and its member distribution is reflected in *Figure 1*:

![Length of MSJDN Membership](image)

*Figure 1*

A. **Service Affiliation**

MSJDN members represent active duty, guard, and reserve families, as well as veteran and retired active duty, guard, and reserve families. Active duty families make up the largest percentage of MSJDN members at 89%. The distribution of each type of service is reflected in *Figure 2*. In addition, a number of MSJDN members are servicemembers or veterans themselves. Three percent of members are currently serving in the military, and 12% are veterans. Among the MSJDN veterans, approximately 6% were Judge Advocate General (JAG) officers.
MSJDN Members represent all branches of service, as reflected in Figure 3. The largest percentage of members is Army at 37%, followed by Navy at 25% and Air Force at 24%.
B. Officer/Enlisted statistics

MJSDN members have spouses that are enlisted, warrant officers, and officers. Approximately 79% of MSJDN member spouses and partners are officers, 1% are warrant officers, and 19% are enlisted. The ranks of MSJDN member spouses and partners vary widely, as reflected in Figure 4. However, the largest distribution is among mid-level officer ranks.

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Figure 4

C. Career Field

As shown in Figure 5, the spouses of MSJDN members come from a wide variety of different career fields within the military. The most common career field for a MSJDN spouse was in the “support” category. The “support” category includes spouses with careers in logistics, supply, acquisitions, force management, systems analysis, transportation, and several others. The categories of aviation, “warfare,” and JAG were the next largest career field designations. The “warfare” category includes spouses with careers in artillery, armor, psychological operations, special warfare designations, and field electronics. The smallest field represented by MSJDN members’ spouses was in the “medical” category, which includes physicians, dentists, and nurses.
II. Characteristics of MSJDN Members

A. Relationship to the Military

MSJDN members are a diverse group, but one thing they have in common is a connection to the United States Uniformed Services. The number of members married to servicemembers is 85%, with another 3% engaged to a servicemember. Of the members who are married to servicemembers, approximately 4% are in a relationship with a same-sex partner.

The length of time that MSJDN members have been in a relationship with their servicemember varies widely, as reflected in Figure 6. The majority of members have been in a relationship with their servicemember between 5-8 years (26% of membership) followed by 2-5 year relationships (20% of membership). As reflected in Figure 7, a significant portion of the time members have been married has been during military service.
B. MSJDN Family Composition

Approximately 53% of MSJDN members have children. Figure 8 reflects the number of children in MSJDN members’ households. The majority of households have 1 or 2 children.
In the MSJDN member households with children, the ages of those children are distributed widely, as reflected in Figure 9. The greatest concentration is among young children, ages five and under.
C. Relocations

Permanent changes of duty station (“PCS moves”) are a frequent occurrence for military families and happen, on average, every two to three years. MSJDN asked its members how many PCS moves they have experienced as military spouse attorneys. Approximately 69% of members indicated they had experienced two or more PCS moves. 30% indicated only one move during the course of their careers. Some members indicated they have experienced more than ten PCS moves.

It should be noted that not all military spouse attorneys move with their servicemember. Approximately 52% of military spouse attorneys have lived remotely from their servicemember in order to maintain a legal career.

![PCS Moves](image)

*Figure 10*

D. Volunteerism

As a community, military spouses tend to perform significant hours of volunteer work. Approximately 78% of members indicated that they do volunteer work in the communities in which they live, and 39% indicated that they volunteer regularly. *Figure 11* reflects the number of hours MSJDN members indicated they volunteer on a weekly basis.
It should be noted that *Figure 11* reflects all volunteer hours performed by members, and is not specific to *pro bono* work. However, 26% of members answered that they do *pro bono* work in jurisdictions where they are licensed. 55% of members said that their ability to obtain a license (or lack thereof) in a new jurisdiction impacts whether they volunteer for their local bar association.
III. Members as Professionals

Approximately 89% of MSJDN members are members of the legal profession. The remaining 13% are law students, or members who have not yet been licensed. The length of time that MSJDN members have been practicing members of the legal profession is reflected in Figure 12.

![Length of Practice](image)

*Figure 12*

The various levels of experience among members are fairly evenly distributed. Roughly 19% of members have between one and three years of practice. Another 28% of members have three to seven years of practice, just under 20% have seven to ten years of practice, and 22% have over ten years of practice.
A. Types of Legal Practice

MSJDN members come from a wide array of legal backgrounds, as reflected in Figure 13.

![Work Experience Chart](chart.png)

Figure 13

The two most common practice backgrounds for MSJDN members are small firm practice and government practice. About 33% of MSJDN members have experience working in a law group that has more than 50 lawyers.

B. Remote Work

Due to frequent moves, it is often hard to keep a single position for an extended period of time unless an employer is willing to permit a military spouse attorney to work remotely. Approximately 35% of members answered that an employer has provided the opportunity to work remotely, but only 13% of those members say that they have been given the opportunity by a legal employer to continue working remotely after a PCS move.

IV. Impact of Military Service on Job Prospects

When asked whether military service has impacted their ability to progress in the legal profession, 82% of members answered in the affirmative. 61% of members report having been asked by a prospective employer about their status as a military spouse. Member responses indicate that their military service is frequently a reason employers choose not to
hire them. Based on member responses, employers provide a number of explanations, including: (a) the fact of frequent moves; (b) concern that deployments will interfere with performance; (c) the existence of gap periods in resumes; or (d) the perception that the military spouse is looking for a job instead of a career.

**A. Employment**

Despite the fact that 85% of members responding to the survey have a license to practice law in at least one jurisdiction, only about 37% report having full-time employment in a job requiring a law license. *Figure 14* reflects member responses concerning current employment status:

![Current Employment Status](image)

*Figure 14*

Of the members not employed full-time in a legal position, 16% have some other kind of job, and 5% are employed part-time while seeking legal employment. Approximately 14% have some kind of part-time or self-employment, while the remaining 28% are unemployed and either still seeking employment, or have decided not to seek employment any longer.
Of the roughly 37% that are employed full-time in legal positions, members are overwhelmingly involved in private practice, with government work a close second. Members work in a number of other legal fields as well, albeit in smaller numbers. These include in-house, non-profit, legal services corporations, and JAG. A small percentage of members are solo practitioners.
Figure 16 reflects the length of time it took for members to find employment after their most recent PCS move. Approximately 25% reported that they did not seek new employment, and 24% reported that they could not find employment as an attorney after a PCS move. Of the remaining members who were able to find work in the legal profession after their latest PCS move, 33% report that they found work within the first six months of moving. Another 9% indicate it took up to a year to find work, while 8% answered that it took them between a year and eighteen months to find work, and another 4% indicated that it took them more than eighteen months to find work in the legal profession.
B. Licenses and credentialing

Approximately 85% of members reported that they have at least one active law license. Another 7% of members are law students, and 5% have earned a juris doctorate but do not yet have a license. This distribution is reflected in Figure 17.

![Figure 17](image7.png)

Figure 17

Figure 18 reflects the number of licenses members have obtained by taking a bar examination in a new jurisdiction:

![Figure 18](image8.png)

Figure 18
Almost 34% of members responded that they have taken more than one bar exam. Approximately 26% say that they have taken two bar exams. Nearly 5% of members responded they have taken more than two bar exams, and a small percentage have taken more than five bar exams.

Figure 19 reflects the number of licenses a particular member has been able to obtain without having to take a bar examination in a new jurisdiction.

![Number of Admissions Without Examination](image)

**Figure 19**

Nearly 76% of members say they have never been admitted to a jurisdiction without having to take a bar examination. 18% say they have been admitted to one jurisdiction without examination, and 6% of members say they have been admitted without examination more than once. Members further reported that the vast majority of those admissions without examination were reciprocity admissions, as reflected in Figure 20.
C. Professional Dues

*Figure 21* below reflects member responses concerning the amount of mandatory bar dues that they pay on an annual basis.
When asked to calculate the total amount they pay in annual bar dues, 25% said they pay less than $250, 17% said they pay between $250 and $350 in bar dues, and 29% say they pay between $350 and $500 in bar dues. 22% say that they pay more than $500 in annual bar dues.

According to member responses, 69% of members maintain an active license in every jurisdiction in which they’ve obtained one. Of the 31% that do not maintain an active law license in every jurisdiction in which they’ve obtained one, 85% say cost is the reason they do not maintain those licenses. Another 37% say it is because they do not intend to return to the jurisdiction.

In addition to mandatory bar dues, many members responded that they pay dues to voluntary bars as well. Those dues are reflected in Figure 22, and are, on the whole, considerably lower than the mandatory bar dues.

![Annual Voluntary Bar Dues](image)

Figure 22

V. Separations and Remote Families

Approximately 52% of members say that they have lived remotely from a servicemember spouse to maintain a legal career. Figure 23 shows the amount of time members have lived remotely from their servicemember and Figure 24 shows the distance members lived remotely from their servicemember spouse.
Of the members who reported having to live remotely from a servicemember spouse, just over 9% of members say that they lived remotely for six months or less. 14% say they lived remotely for six months to a year, while 25% say they lived remotely between one and three years. The remaining 7% say they have lived remotely from their servicemember spouse for more than three years.
Of the members who reported living remotely from their servicemember, 9% say they have lived 100-300 miles away from their servicemember spouse. Another 10% say they have lived between 300 and 500 miles apart, and 12% of members say they lived between 500 and 1,000 miles from their servicemember spouse. The greatest concentration, over 26%, says they lived more than 1,000 miles away from their servicemember.

A. Families with Children

Approximately 13% of members reported that they have had to live remotely from a spouse to maintain a legal career and they had children in the home while living remotely. Figure 25 reflects the amount of time members had to live remotely with children, and Figure 26 reflects the distance they lived from their servicemember while living remotely.

![Length of Remote Time with Children](image)

Figure 25

Of the families that have had to live remotely with children, just under 5% say they lived remotely for six months or less. 7% of families say they lived remotely between one and three years, while 1% say they lived remotely for three years or more with children.
Of the families who say they have lived remotely with children, approximately 3.5% lived between 100 and 500 miles from their servicemember. Approximately 11% say they have lived more than 500 miles apart.
VI. **Student Loan Debt**

Based on member responses, 89% of members used student loans to pay for some or all of their schooling. *Figure 27* shows the total debt incurred by members for undergraduate degrees. *Figure 28* shows the total debt incurred by members for law school degrees. And *Figure 29* shows the total debt members still owe from their student loans.

![Undergraduate Debt](image)

*Figure 27*

Approximately 54% of members say that they completed their undergraduate degrees without incurring any student loan debt. Another 29% say they incurred less than $20,000 in loan debt to complete their undergraduate degree, and nearly 13% said they incurred between $20,000 and $50,000. Less than 5% incurred more than $50,000 in student loan debt to complete an undergraduate degree.
Approximately 11% of members say that they finished law school with no student loan debt. The greatest concentration of members, 35% say they finished law school with between $80,000 and $140,000 in student loan debt. 32% of members say they graduated with between $20,000 and $80,000 in student loan debt, and 18% say they incurred more than $140,000 in student loan debt by the time they finished law school.
Approximately 24% of members say that they currently have no outstanding student loans. The largest distribution of members, 31%, says that they currently have between $20,000 and $80,000 in outstanding student loans. 17% of members say they have more than $110,000 in student loans, and 8% say their balance is over $200,000.

When asked whether their level of outstanding loans impacts their spouse’s decision to stay in the military, 31% of members answered in the affirmative. In addition, 34% of military spouses say that student loan debt affects their decision about whether or not to PCS with their servicemember.
A. Household Income

Household income among MSJDN members varies widely, with the largest distribution of income between $100,000 and $149,000, as shown in Figure 30. Based on member responses to the question concerning their servicemember’s rank, as reflected in Figure 4 above, this data would suggest that even in the households reporting income on the higher end of the spectrum, the attorney spouse in the household is being paid below the national average for attorneys.

![Household Income Graph](image)

*Figure 30*