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ANCHORED NETWORKS: NAVIGATING FORMAL AND INFORMAL PATHWAYS TO
ACCESS EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES IN TRANSIENT AND MILITARY FAMILIES

by

Lara Linnay Ray

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May, 2025

Dissertation Committee

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University of San Diego

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TITLE OF DISSERTATION: ANCHORED NETWORKS: NAVIGATING FORMAL AND
INFORMAL PATHWAYS TO ACCESS EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES IN TRANSIENT
AND MILITARY FAMILIES

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Navy families in San Diego establish and use formal and informal networks to access educational resources for their children following relocation. Grounded in social capital theory, the research employed a multiple-case study approach, integrating data from interviews, focus groups, and digital analysis of Navy-affiliated social media platforms. The study explores how parents navigate these networks to promote their children's academic success, with particular attention to key decision-making moments, resource negotiation, and equity considerations. Participants included Navy spouses from diverse ranks (E-3 to O-6) and socioeconomic backgrounds, providing insight into disparities in resource access. Findings reveal that Navy spouses play a critical role in building social capital within their communities by acting as connectors and advocates. A central theme emerging from this study is the concept of *rapid selective trust*, where Navy families develop swift, trust-based relationships within networks to address immediate educational needs. This contrasts with conventional models of social capital that emphasize gradual trust-building. This study also highlights disparities in access to social capital based on rank and location, with enlisted families facing greater systemic barriers. Despite these inequities, families employ innovative strategies, such as leveraging social media platforms and spouse-led organizations to minimize challenges. By situating Navy families' experiences within the broader context of highly mobile populations, this research highlights the universal importance of social capital in navigating systemic barriers. These findings highlight the adaptability of transient communities and offer practical insights for developing more equitable and effective support systems.

DEDICATION

To my parents, for being my unwavering foundation and consistent support. Your love, encouragement, and belief in me have been my guiding light and source of inspiration in everything I have ever done.

To my children, Emma, Charles, and Helen, who have put up with me during this journey, supported me, and cheered me on every step of the way. You are my greatest pride and my constant source of inspiration.

To my husband, Rich, who has been my rock, my confidant, and my biggest champion. Your steadfast love and encouragement have carried me through moments of doubt and exhaustion. Thank you for believing in me even when I struggled to believe in myself.

To my fellow Navy spouses, the anchor and support of so many families. We endure, we adapt, and we persevere through challenges with grace, strength, and an unbreakable spirit.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

My story of advocacy in the military community is inextricably intertwined with my narrative as a white, middle-class female, veteran, immigrant, and the spouse of a high-ranking military officer. This unique positionality shapes my journey through resilience, sacrifice, and a continuous search for support amidst the distinct adversities of military life. Through this lens, I have witnessed the critical importance of fostering connections that transcend rank and circumstance, building networks that empower others to navigate the complexities of this unique lifestyle.

Before embracing my role as a military spouse, I committed 8 years to active duty and 4 more years to reserve duty. During this tenure, I navigated the dual challenges of fulfilling military duties and managing parental responsibilities, often feeling overwhelmed and under supported despite my deep understanding of military protocols and procedures. The complexity of childcare, deployments, and the isolation from being stationed away from familiar settings, including a 4-year overseas assignment, highlighted the lack of comprehensive resources. This absence was particularly felt in accessing military childcare services, where barriers significantly impacted my ability to secure necessary support.

A particularly challenging episode was the 2-year period of separation from my spouse during our time in Japan. Alone in a foreign environment, I faced the daunting tasks of adapting to a new culture, maintaining a career, and caring for our two young children without a traditional extended family and friend support network. This situation was exacerbated by the lack of guidance from my command and formed friendships between a predominantly male-dominated workforce, which deepened my sense of isolation and frustration.

The military's prioritization system for childcare services further disadvantages those who are not considered dual military (where both parents are active duty), placing them in the lowest priority category for childcare. Even though I was considered dual military, my children were placed on a waiting list, forcing me to find additional childcare through another military mother on base. Childcare issues coupled with the hurdles of relocating and the scant support from both welcoming and departing commands, highlight some of the challenges faced by military families. Additionally, balancing full-time employment and attempting to build a support network in an unfamiliar setting was made more difficult by my limited use of social media and working in a predominantly male engineering field. The requirement to perform overnight watch duties without familial backup was particularly taxing. The pressure to develop social ties and trust others with my child's care during these duties contributed significantly to my decision to exit military service. Transitioning to civilian life in the United States, while my spouse remained in Japan, presented its own set of challenges. I relied on a wide range of resources, including family support, to navigate through the information maze related to relocating and ensuring my children's well-being. This process required a personalized approach, akin to navigating a “choose your own adventure” scenario, without a clear guidebook.

This transition period also reignited my passion for advocacy and support within the military spouse community. Leveraging the solidarity among military families and my innate determination, I focused on advocating for change and offering support to those in need often through informal connections with other Navy spouses. This included creating social support groups within my husband's command during their deployments, where we shared resources, offered emotional support, and navigated challenges together. These groups have become a vital

network, fostering a sense of community and resilience in addition to addressing the unique hardships faced by military families.

After transitioning from the Navy, I witnessed firsthand the profound impact of my children primarily having one parent present and the critical need for someone to advocate for them, especially in their academic journey amid frequent relocations. These experiences inspired me to pursue a career in education, recognizing it as an opportunity to be deeply involved in their growth and to support them in navigating the challenges of military life. Now as both an educator and an active community advocate, I remain steadfast in my dedication to addressing the unique challenges faced by military families. My goal is to create meaningful change by fostering understanding, offering support, and ensuring that no family feels left behind in the pursuit of stability and opportunity for their children.

Drawing on my rich tapestry of personal experiences while recognizing these are shared experiences with many military spouses, I was compelled to explore how the challenges and strategies we encounter as military spouses might mirror those faced by other highly mobile groups such as those experiencing homelessness, children in foster care, migrants, immigrants, and those displaced by war or natural disasters. My journey of navigating frequent relocations, building relationships in unfamiliar environments, and advocating for my family's well-being provided a unique lens through which to examine resilience and support systems within these diverse contexts.

This study therefore builds upon these insights to highlight the shared and divergent experiences of military spouses, focusing on the critical role of relationships, trust, and networks (otherwise known as social capital), in navigating systemic barriers. By comparing these parallel challenges, this research argues that mobility fundamentally reshapes how individuals and

families access resources, maintain stability, and build community connections. Through this exploration, I endeavored to shed light on the broader implications of mobility and its impact on social and educational outcomes. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the resilience required to navigate these transitions and emphasize the importance of creating inclusive, adaptive support systems. In doing so, this research offers a nuanced perspective that bridges the gaps between theory and lived experiences, providing actionable insights for fostering stability and equity among highly mobile populations.

From Military Moves to Global Shifts

Studies like this one are particularly important considering the ongoing wildfires in California, which have displaced thousands of families, closed schools, and disrupted communities. These fires highlight the immediate and long-term repercussions of climate change, adding to the challenges posed by the global economy and ongoing international conflicts. Together, these factors have created increased complexity for families forced to relocate in search of safety, stability, and new economic opportunities. Yet, even without accounting for such acute crises, many families already face significant challenges due to frequent relocations. Among the children residing with these families, an estimated 8.2 million youngsters between the ages of 6 and 18 relocated within the United States in 2023, up from nearly 7.9 million in 2022 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024). These highly mobile students, defined as those who changed schools “six or more times throughout their K-12 education” (Walls, 2003, p. 2), comprise a diverse range of individuals. This group encompasses children of migrant laborers, foster children, those from families affected by domestic violence, offspring of families facing economic instability and potential homelessness, as well as those with military and immigrant family backgrounds (Walls, 2003). In recent years, the scale of mobility has only

grown. Rising homelessness among children, which increased by 33% in 2024, highlights the precarious conditions many families face (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024). Immigration continues to reshape communities, with millions of new arrivals each year seeking stability and opportunity. At the same time, natural disasters, such as the California wildfires, further displace families, compounding the challenges of relocation and adjustment. The diverse and growing population of highly mobile students stresses the urgent need for targeted studies and resources. Whether mobility stems from economic hardship, climate change, or life circumstances, the constant movement of these families has far-reaching implications for their children's education, well-being, and future opportunities.

Challenges Facing Highly Mobile Families

For these frequently relocating students, a range of challenges arises. Research has evidenced that frequent moves can have detrimental consequences on their emotional and academic well-being (Hanushek et al., 2000; Mantzicopoulos & Knutson, 2000; Miller, 2015; Rumberger & Larson, 1998). Such studies have shown that these moves often lead to feelings of isolation, reduced attendance, lower academic achievement, a higher likelihood of grade repetition, and, in some cases, maltreatment (Eckenrode et al., 1995). Research has shown that social support is crucial for individuals to cope with stress, with its absence potentially worsening the impact of stressful events (Miller, 2015, Rossetto, 2015). For highly mobile students and families, such as those experiencing frequent relocations, educational and social support is accessed through a combination of formal and informal networks and typically by their parents (Chumo et al., 2023; Mancini et al., 2018; Menjivar, 2000; Portes & Rumbaut, 2014; Putnam, 2000). Formal networks consist of structured systems with professional services, including educational programs, social welfare, and legal aid, which also help bolster informal

community ties (Huebner et al., 2007). Informal networks, on the other hand, are made up of personal relationships with family, friends, social media contacts, and colleagues, offering more personalized assistance (Mancini et al., 2018).

Each subgroup of highly mobile students faces unique challenges in navigating educational resources, as well as distinct assets that can be leveraged. Families experiencing homelessness, often led by single mothers, face financial instability and mental health challenges, which can weaken social support networks (McGrath et al., 2023; Miller, 2015). However, these families often demonstrate resilience and resourcefulness by forming informal support networks and seeking out community resources (McGrath et al., 2023; Miller, 2015). Immigrant families frequently pool resources and rely on strong cultural networks to support one another, though language barriers, legal concerns, and inconsistent access to services can create obstacles (Menjivar, 2000; Quezada et al., 2013). Recognizing both the challenges and strengths of these groups is essential for developing effective, equitable interventions.

Military families encounter their own unique challenges, not only due to their frequent relocations but also because these moves often cover significant distances. Such transitions disrupt academic continuity and require the establishment of new support networks at each location. These challenges are particularly pronounced for families with children requiring individualized education programs (IEPs) or those with medical needs. However, given the variability in educational policies and resources across states, all military-affiliated children are affected. Although military families benefit from structured support systems, such as family readiness groups and healthcare services tailored to their needs, economic barriers remain a considerable challenge. Approximately 25% of military families face food insecurity, a challenge exacerbated by the high cost of living in areas with quality schools, like San Diego, where

expenses often surpass the basic allowance for housing (BAH; Alvarado, 2022). The financial burden intensified after a 2019 legislative change requiring military members to cover 5% of housing costs, effectively reducing their housing and utility subsidy to 95% (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018). A 2022 study by the Military Family Advisory Network revealed that nearly 59.4% of military households in civilian housing spend over \$251 monthly from their own funds on housing and utilities (Military Family Advisory Network, 2022). Given these economic considerations, it becomes crucial to examine how they influence access to educational resources for military families, particularly in terms of issues related to access and equity.

The Problem: Meeting the Needs of Military Affiliated Students

Military-affiliated children, dependents of active duty personnel, total 650,000 school-age students (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2021), with the largest concentration in California (Military OneSource, 2021). Despite their overall reputation for strong academic performance, the available data primarily reflect a small subset of military-connected students attending Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) schools. These schools, which serve only about 11% of the military-affiliated student population, primarily overseas, consistently outperform national averages, with students scoring 15 to 23 points higher than their civilian peers in recent assessments (DoDEA, 2021).

For the vast majority of military-affiliated students enrolled in U.S. public schools, however, comprehensive data on academic performance remain limited. The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 sought to address this gap through the introduction of the military student identifier, which requires states to collect and report assessment data on military-connected students (*10 U.S. Code Subtitle A - General Military Law*, 2025). Yet, as of 2025, comprehensive data on the nationwide implementation status of the military student identifier is limited, leaving

an incomplete national picture of these students' academic outcomes. This lack of data makes it challenging to fully understand and address the educational experiences of military students, particularly as they navigate frequent relocations, inconsistent support services, and varying educational policies (Bowen & Martin, 2011; Corry et al., 2021).

The absence of comprehensive data from most schools highlights the disparity in resources and support mechanisms available to military-affiliated students. Although DoDEA schools have successfully minimized relocation challenges through standardized curricula and culturally competent educators, such practices are not as prevalent in civilian schools, where most military children are enrolled. This reality underscores the urgent need for more robust data collection and consistent support to ensure that the unique needs of military-affiliated children are adequately addressed in all educational settings.

The Impact of Mobility on Student Success

Frequent relocations, often every 12 to 36 months, create academic, social, and emotional disruptions for military-affiliated students. Adjusting to new curricula, graduation requirements, and standardized testing systems can hinder academic progress and social integration (Esqueda et al., 2012). These challenges are compounded by the emotional strain of parental deployments, which can lead to behavioral concerns, reduced academic engagement, and social-emotional difficulties (Richardson et al., 2011).

For students requiring specialized services or advanced academic programs, mobility exacerbates disparities. Variations in state policies and resource availability mean that some families face significant delays in accessing necessary support, such as IEPs or gifted education services (Kitmitto et al., 2011). Despite initiatives like the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, gaps persist. Military Interstate

Children's Compact Commission's 2022 report revealed that nearly 60% of cases concerning military children fell outside the compact's scope, highlighting systemic challenges that disproportionately impact this population.

Navigating Systems of Support

Military families rely on a combination of formal and informal networks to navigate educational transitions and mitigate challenges. Formal systems, such as the DoDEA, military readiness groups, and advocacy initiatives like the National Military Spouse Network, provide critical guidance on issues such as IEP transfers and access to educational resources. Informal networks, including social media groups and spouse-led community initiatives, often fill gaps by offering real-time advice and localized knowledge.

However, access to these support systems is not equitable. Factors such as rank, geography, and socioeconomic resources shape families' ability to leverage available networks effectively (Corry et al., 2021). For example, enlisted families often face greater financial strain and limited housing options especially in high-cost areas like San Diego, which can hinder access to high-performing schools. Conversely, officers may have stronger connections within military leadership and greater financial flexibility, enabling them to navigate these challenges more successfully. As a former officer and now a senior officer's spouse, I have experienced this dynamic firsthand. Access to leadership networks and the financial stability that often accompanies higher ranks provide a level of support and resource availability that can significantly ease the burdens of frequent relocations. However, this is not the case for all military families, underscoring the disparities in how challenges are managed across ranks.

Framing the Study: Why This Research Matters

Military-affiliated families navigate unique challenges due to frequent relocations, requiring them to adapt to new environments and rebuild essential social connections. With 88% of military spouses being women (Military OneSource, 2019), spouse-led networks play a critical role in fostering resilience and providing continuity. Advocacy groups and community organizations, such as the National Military Spouse Network, offer essential support, but engagement remains uneven, and systemic barriers persist.

This study focuses on Navy families in San Diego, a region with the highest concentration of military-connected K-12 students in the nation (San Diego Military Family Collaborative, 2024). It examines how military spouses navigate both formal and informal networks to address their children's educational needs amidst frequent relocations. Specifically, the research explores the adaptive strategies spouses employ to overcome systemic inequities shaped by rank, socioeconomic status, and geographic constraints. By investigating the role of social capital, this study highlights how military spouses facilitate their children's academic success and address barriers in accessing resources. The findings provide critical insights into the challenges faced by highly mobile populations and offer practical recommendations for improving support systems, emphasizing the need for equity-driven approaches tailored to the complexities of military family life.

Research Questions

To gain a deeper understanding of how Navy families navigate educational resources amidst frequent relocations, this research was guided by the following research questions. These questions were developed to explore not only the strategies families use to access educational support but also the systemic barriers that shape these experiences. By focusing on both the formal and informal networks leveraged by military spouses, this study aims to uncover the

broader implications of social capital in mitigating inequities and promoting educational continuity for military-affiliated children.

1. How do parents establish and use both formal and informal networks to navigate and access resources for promoting their children's academic success following relocation?
 - a. What were the key moments of decision-making during this process?
 - b. Who are the key players in these negotiations?
 - c. How are the resources negotiated?
 - d. How do Navy spouses contribute to social capital within the military community?
2. What specific educational resources are accessible to Navy spouses in San Diego through both formal and informal networks?
 - e. Which resources are absent and what are the reasons behind their absence?
2. How do equity considerations unfold in the access to resources among Navy-affiliated students in San Diego, considering factors such as rank (Officer, Enlisted)?

Research Roadmap: Exploring Social Capital and Military Families

The central argument in this dissertation is that social capital is not merely a theoretical construct but a practical framework for understanding how Navy families navigate the systemic challenges associated with frequent relocations. In practice, social capital encompasses the networks, relationships, and trust that families leverage to overcome barriers to accessing educational resources for their children. For military families, these networks, both formal and informal, become critical tools for adapting to new environments and ensuring continuity in their children's academic and socioemotional well-being.

This research builds upon studies of other highly mobile populations, such as immigrants, refugees, foster families, and individuals experiencing homelessness, to draw meaningful parallels and identify transferable strategies. Although these groups face unique challenges, they also exhibit resilience and resourcefulness, often relying on bonding, bridging, and linking social capital to create support systems. In this study, Navy families are examined through the lens of these dynamics to uncover how they construct and navigate networks that minimize the impacts of systemic barriers and inequities shaped by factors such as rank, socioeconomic status, and geographic location.

Organizational factors, such as military relocation policies, institutional support systems, and the localized availability of resources, significantly shape how social capital operates within the military context. This research sheds light on how these factors interact with the proactive agency of Navy spouses, who often serve as the architects of their families' social networks. By focusing on Navy families in San Diego, this study provides localized insights into the lived experiences of military families and the systemic inefficiencies they encounter, offering implications for broader populations facing similar mobility challenges. The subsequent chapters build upon this central argument, outlining the theoretical, methodological, and analytical pathways that guided this research:

Chapter two explores the theoretical and conceptual framework of social capital, situating military families within the broader context of highly mobile populations. This chapter traces the sociohistorical development of social capital theory, reviews existing literature on the educational challenges faced by military families, and identifies parallels with other transient groups to highlight transferable strategies. The chapter concludes by addressing critical gaps in

the research, emphasizing the need for localized and nuanced studies of military families' experiences.

Chapter three details the methodology, including the pilot study that informed the research design, participant selection, data collection, and analysis. This chapter introduces the themes generated from the data, such as selective trust, resource gaps, rank-based inequities, and structural barriers, and outlines the coding schema used to synthesize these themes into actionable findings.

Chapter four presents the data and subsequent findings, organized around the key themes that emerged from the data and as delineated in chapter three. This chapter provides a detailed account of how Navy families in San Diego navigate educational resources, emphasizing the adaptive strategies and systemic barriers they encounter. It highlights the interplay of resilience and inequity within these families' experiences.

Chapter five interprets the findings in relation to the research questions, offering insights into how Navy families leverage social capital to bridge gaps in resource access and address systemic inefficiencies. This chapter discusses how bonding, bridging, and linking social capital are used to create networks of support and explores the broader implications for social capital theory and policy design.

Chapter six concludes the dissertation by synthesizing the key findings and discussing their implications for research, theory, practice, and policy. This chapter highlights the importance of addressing systemic barriers to resource access, proposes recommendations for supporting military and other transient families, and suggests avenues for future research to improve equitable resource accessibility. It also reflects on the broader significance of social

capital as a framework for understanding resilience and adaptation among highly mobile populations.

This research contributes to the field of social capital theory by providing a deeper understanding of how military families navigate systemic challenges and leverage networks to support their children's education. The findings have broader implications for policymakers, educators, and support organizations, offering strategies to improve resource accessibility and equity for transient populations. Ultimately, this dissertation helps to bridge the gap between theory and practice, emphasizing the critical role of social capital in fostering resilience and opportunity in the face of mobility-induced challenges.

CHAPTER TWO

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

The central argument of this dissertation is that social capital is instrumental in how Navy families address the systemic challenges of frequent relocations, particularly in accessing educational resources for their children. This understanding is guided by research questions rooted in the recognition that military families, as a highly mobile population, face significant disruptions in educational and social continuity. Although existing research has explored the obstacles confronting military families, there remains a gap in understanding how they utilize both formal and informal networks to navigate and mitigate these challenges.

This chapter builds on this argument by discussing the theoretical framework of social capital, drawing insights from studies on other highly mobile populations, including immigrants, refugees, foster families, and individuals experiencing homelessness. It examines how these groups' experiences inform an analysis of the adaptive strategies and systemic barriers faced by military families. The chapter begins with an exploration of the sociohistorical development of social capital theory and its relevance to the lived experiences of Navy families. It then reviews literature on the educational challenges unique to military families, situating these issues within the broader context of highly mobile populations to identify parallels and transferable strategies. Finally, the chapter addresses critical gaps in the existing research, highlighting the need for localized, in-depth studies that address inequities in access to and use of resources among military families.

Theoretical Framework: Sociohistorical Roots and Evolution of Social Capital

Social capital theory is highly relevant to studying highly mobile families because it provides a critical framework for analyzing how these families build, maintain, and leverage

networks to access resources and navigate challenges. Understanding its relevance requires an exploration of the theory's origins, evolution, and contemporary applications, which illuminate its potential as a lens for examining the unique dynamics of mobility and resource utilization. Key contributors to this theory include Bourdieu (1985), Coleman (1988), Putnam (2000), and Woolcock (2002). Their work provides the foundation for what social capital means, the history and conditions surrounding its emergence in applied social sciences, and how contemporary scholars take it up as a framework for inquiry.

Emergence of Social Capital

Social capital is the collection of resources and benefits that people or groups can access through their social networks. These networks are built on trust, mutual support, and shared norms. Social capital explains how our connections with others can provide us with emotional support, valuable information, or practical resources. Prior to the emergence of theories of social capital, theorists such as Marx (Heinrich & Locascio, 2012) and Schultz (1972) mainly focused on capital in the form of material (financial or physical resources) or human capital (skills and education) respectively. These frameworks contributed towards understanding how individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds experienced different levels of social mobility, despite similar material resources, however, did not consider social networks and the role they played in distributing information, support, and opportunities.

Bourdieu (1985), added onto these foundational authors by seeking to explain why people could move up the social ladder and how others remained stuck despite similar educational backgrounds. These observations led him to discover the importance of networks of relationships as part of a broader framework that includes economic and cultural capital. He theorized that these different forms of capital work together to shape power dynamics, social

mobility, and access to resources. Bourdieu also argued that individuals from more privileged backgrounds often have greater access to social networks, which help them navigate institutions like education and employment, giving them a significant advantage.

In addition to social capital, Bourdieu also introduced the concept of cultural capital, which includes the knowledge, skills, and cultural assets that individuals accumulate (Bourdieu, 2011). These cultural assets often work in tandem with social capital to influence how people navigate social structures. Although cultural capital is not the primary focus in this study, it is important to recognize its role in shaping the experiences of military families, particularly in how they adapt to new environments and access educational resources. For example, families of higher-ranking officers often possess both significant social and cultural capital, which can ease the challenges of relocation. These families may be more familiar with educational systems across different states, have financial access to better school districts, and be better equipped to advocate their children's needs. They leverage both their networks and their understanding of cultural norms within military and civilian communities. On the other hand, enlisted families, who may have fewer financial and social resources, might struggle more with these transitions. This reflects how both social and cultural capital can either reinforce or alleviate inequality.

Coleman (1988), expanded on the concept of social capital by highlighting its role in educational contexts. He argued that social networks within families and communities are crucial for the transmission of human capital, particularly through the support they provide for children's education. Although Coleman primarily focused on social capital, he also recognized the importance of cultural capital, understanding that the knowledge and practices shared within social networks often carry deeply rooted educational values and norms. This connection is particularly relevant for military families, where the combination of social and cultural capital

can significantly impact the continuity of children's education, especially during frequent relocations (Arnold et al., 2014; Davis et al., 2016).

Putnam (2000) brought a broader societal perspective to the discussion of social capital, emphasizing the decline of community-based social capital in modern societies. While Putnam's work primarily deals with the social ties that bind communities, there's a subtle connection to cultural capital in his discussion of shared values and norms, which are integral to fostering social cohesion. Putnam's concepts of "bridging" and "bonding" social capital can also be applied to military families, where bridging capital refers to connections made with local civilian communities during relocations, and bonding capital refers to the tight-knit networks within the military community itself. It's important to recognize that Putnam's concepts were developed with relatively stable communities in mind, where individuals have the time and opportunity to build trust over long periods. For example he states that networks "embody past success at collaboration, which can serve as a cultural template for future collaboration" (Putnam, 2000, p. 66) indicating that networks and trust are deeply intertwined, and trust stems from repeated, cooperative engagement over time. When applying these concepts to military families, who often have fewer chances to form deep, lasting bonds with their surrounding communities due to frequent relocations, their outcomes may differ from these expectations.

Expanding upon Putnam's concepts, Woolcock (2002) added in a third dimension called "linking" social capital which focuses on relationships that allow individuals or groups to access formal resources such as those provided by government agencies or educational institutions. Woolcock (2002) emphasized that linking social capital is all about the relationships that connect people to power, privilege, and the resources they need. His discussion highlights how these

connections can help bridge the gap between those with limited access and those in positions of power.

Social Capital Today

Since Putnam's influence, the concept of social capital has continued to evolve due to several factors. One significant development is the rise of digital and online social capital, which has introduced new forms of participation and community through digital platforms. These platforms have not only enabled the formation of virtual communities but also facilitated economic migration by making remote work possible from virtually any location. Diminescu (2008) coined the term "connected migrant" to describe the contemporary trend of maintaining cultural connections via digital means despite physical relocation. As Diminescu (2008) observed, "Today's borders are no longer constrained by physical geography" (p. 568), allowing migrants to integrate into host societies more easily than before.

Economic migration, empowered by remote work, has significantly influenced the evolution of social capital. The increased mobility of individuals seeking better economic opportunities has given rise to transnational social capital, a concept explored by Faist (2008). In this model, Faist notes that temporary labor migration has become more prominent, with social connections spanning across countries. The proportion of individuals engaged in such migration has increased from 1%–2% in the 1960s to about 3% of the world population today (Faist, 2008) indicating an increasing trend in global migration and therefore an increase in those using social capital to navigate resources.

This rise in economic migration has coincided with a technological shift that has reshaped how individuals build and maintain social capital. As traditional community ties weaken, information and communication technologies (ICTs) foster new modes of participation

and community building (Hoffmann et al., 2022; Rainie & Wellman, 2012). Rainie and Wellman (2012) introduced the term “networked individualism” to describe how people rely more on personal networks than on community-based ones. This shift highlights the changing nature of social capital in modern societies. Digital access has reshaped social capital, and more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted its importance. During the pandemic, one study indicated that trust - the variable most commonly associated with social capital- increased amongst family members, but decreased in institutions and governments (C. Wu, 2021). These results indicated an erosion of linking social capital during a pandemic. This trend can be traced back to Putnam’s original work and is supported by more recent findings from Faist (2008), which connect physical distancing to weakening community ties and reduced civic participation.

Overall, the evolution of social capital reflects a complex interplay between digital innovation, economic migration, and shifting community dynamics. Although traditional forms of social capital may be weakening, new forms are emerging, demonstrating the adaptive nature of social relationships in modern society. Furthermore, despite the inevitable change of how humans interact with one another, the fundamental importance of social capital to societal cohesion and individual well-being remains constant.

Challenges and Inequities in Social Networks

Social capital, as Sawhill (2020) notes, has a dual nature, it can be either “inclusive” or “exclusive,” with “trust, norms, and institutions easier to destroy than to revive” (p. 1). This duality highlights the inherent complexity of social capital, making it difficult to measure. Although social trust has been identified as a key indicator of social capital, studies have shown a steady decline in trust-related metrics, such as talking to neighbors and religious attendance,

since the 1970's (Sawhill, 2020). This decline underscores the fragile nature of trust within social networks, particularly in impersonal or transient contexts.

A major challenge of social capital is its potential to perpetuate inequality. Privileged individuals often have greater access to social capital, enabling them to secure more opportunities (Coleman, 1988). Conversely, marginalized groups frequently struggle to build or leverage valuable networks. Bonding social capital, which strengthens ties within close-knit communities, can foster solidarity but also lead to exclusion and deepen divisions (Putnam, 2000). Bridging social capital, which connects diverse groups, offers access to new opportunities but remains difficult for marginalized communities to establish and rarely leads to economic mobility (Lancee, 2010). Similarly, linking social capital, connections to institutions and authority, can exacerbate power imbalances when only certain groups can navigate formal structures effectively (Coleman, 1988).

Operationalization of Social Capital in the Context of This Study

In the context of this study, social capital was operationalized as the networks, relationships, reciprocity, and trust experienced by Naval spouses. This study focused on how these tenets were utilized to maintain continuity by Navy spouses for their k-12 children's education. To delve deeper, the study explored three key types of social capital; bonding, bridging, linking, and how each type played a role in fostering stability for military families.

Bonding Social Capital

This dimension refers to the close-knit relationships within military communities with “thick trust” (Lancee, 2010, p. 1), such as those between military families, where shared experiences and mutual support play a critical role. Bonding social capital will be examined through the lens of informal networks, such as peer groups and familial ties, which provide

emotional support, practical advice, and localized knowledge crucial for navigating new educational environments.

Bridging Social Capital

Bridging social capital involves the connections that military families establish with local civilian communities during relocations, often characterized by “thin trust” (Lancee, 2010, p. 1). Drawing on Granovetter’s (1973) concept of “the strength of weak ties,” (p.1360), this study will explore how military families engage with local institutions, such as schools, community centers, and non-military organizations, to access educational resources and integrate into new environments. The ability to bridge these networks is crucial for accessing a broader range of resources and opportunities that may not be available within the military community alone

Linking Social Capital

Linking social capital pertains to the connections between military families and formal institutions or organizations that hold authority or provide services. This includes relationships with military support organizations, such as DoDEA, and civilian institutions like schools and local government agencies. The study will investigate how these formal networks are leveraged to secure necessary educational support, particularly for children with special needs or those facing significant academic challenges due to relocations.

Balancing Social Capital

Several studies discuss the importance of balancing all three forms of social capital, where an unbalance can lead to negative outcomes (Aldrich, 2012; Nakagawa & Shaw, 2004). Putnam (2000), discusses the potential “dark side” of social capital, emphasizing that when improperly balanced, it can exacerbate resource inequalities. Research on post-crisis

management shows communities with well-rounded levels of all three forms achieve better outcomes than those lacking this balance (Aldrich, 2012; Nakagawa & Shaw, 2004).

Interaction with Other Relevant Theories

Other relevant theories to this study include cultural capital, human capital, and social support theory. These theories collectively support the broader framework of social capital. Cultural capital, which complements social capital, encompasses the knowledge, skills, and cultural competencies that families possess (Bourdieu, 1985; Cross et al., 1989), influencing their ability to advocate for their children's educational needs. Cross et al. (1989) defined culture as the "thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, and values ...of a social group" (p. 7), emphasizing its central role in shaping families' interactions with educational systems. Cultural competence, as described by Cross, "acknowledges and incorporates—at all levels—the importance of culture...and the adaptation of services to meet culturally-unique needs" (p. 7). These definitions highlight how cultural capital intersects systemic factors, shaping access to resources and equity in education. Understanding why some families navigate educational resources more easily than others requires examining not only the families' cultural knowledge but also the cultural competency of professionals. Professionals with cultural competency are better equipped to understand and address culturally unique needs, thereby supporting families more effectively in accessing educational resources (Cross et al., 1989).

Human capital, as described by Coleman (1988), refers to the knowledge, skills, and experience individuals possess that help them access resources. In this study, human capital will be examined to understand how military families utilize their networks to support their children's educational development. This includes the roles of parental involvement, peer influences, and community support in fostering educational continuity and success.

Social support theory, introduced by Sydney Cobb (1976), emphasizes the importance of social networks in providing emotional and practical assistance, especially during stressful times or major life changes. This theory is particularly relevant to the experiences of military families, who often face unique stressors such as frequent relocations, prolonged separations, and the challenges of reintegration. Effective social support can significantly mitigate these challenges, enhancing the overall well-being and resilience of military families.

Although an understanding of social capital offers valuable background and context for how military families may behave, relying exclusively on these theories is inadequate for a comprehensive understanding of social capital within this unique context. This inadequacy arises because military families are their own unique group, with migratory patterns that do not mimic any other highly mobile group. The unique challenges faced by this highly mobile group, such as the distance traveled, frequency of moves, diverse locations, and parental absences, demand a more nuanced approach. Since social capital among military spouses has not been extensively studied, this research offers an opportunity to conceptualize and explore this phenomenon in depth.

Military Families and Social Capital

Military families, like other highly mobile groups, often face significant challenges due to frequent relocations. These challenges include disruptions in children's education, difficulties in accessing consistent healthcare, and the social and emotional strain of continually establishing new social networks (Esqueda et al., 2012; Huebner et al., 2007). These challenges are further exacerbated by the variability in educational policies, curriculum, graduation requirements, and available resources across different states, districts, and countries, all of which disproportionately

affect military children, particularly those requiring specialized services or IEP's (Davis et al., 2016).

Military families utilize both formal and informal networks to manage the challenges of mobility. Formal networks, such as family readiness groups, military support organizations, and DoDEA school systems, provide structured guidance on navigating educational transitions, including transferring school records and maintaining continuity in special education services (Kitmitto et al., 2011; Mancini et al., 2018). Informal networks, such as social media groups, local military spouse organizations, and community connections, play an equally important role, offering real-time, practical advice on schools, extracurricular opportunities, and local resources (O'Neal et al., 2020).

Despite the support provided by these networks, challenges remain. Not all military families have equal access to bridging social capital, as factors such as rank, socioeconomic status, and geographic location can influence their ability to establish connections and navigate local resources effectively (Corry et al., 2021). Enlisted families, for example, may face greater barriers due to limited financial resources or reduced proximity to high-quality schools especially in San Diego where the cost of living is so high. These disparities highlight the need for a more nuanced understanding of how different forms of social capital operate within Navy families and how they can be leveraged to address systemic inequities.

Unanswered Questions: Unpacking the Complexities of Social Capital in Military Families

Although existing research provides valuable insights into the challenges military families face and the role of social capital in mitigating these challenges, critical gaps remain in understanding how this operates in practice. The specific ways military families leverage social capital to navigate frequent relocations, particularly in high-cost areas like San Diego, require

further exploration. San Diego presents a unique environment where the high cost of living, significant geographic variation, and the presence of a large military population amplify the complexities of accessing consistent resources.

One of the central unanswered questions is how rank, socioeconomic status, and proximity to base influence the ability of families to access and utilize bridging, bonding, and linking social capital. For instance, higher-ranking families may have greater access to formal networks and financial resources, enabling them to navigate relocations with more ease. Conversely, enlisted families often face structural inequities, such as limited housing options and fewer financial reserves, which can constrain their ability to build and leverage social capital effectively. Understanding these variations is essential for identifying inequities and proposing solutions tailored to families across the socioeconomic spectrum.

Military spouses, who are typically the primary facilitators of social capital for their families, play a pivotal role in connecting their households to both military and civilian resources. However, little is known about the strategies they use to build and sustain these networks. Do spouses with prior relocation experience or higher levels of education navigate these transitions more effectively? How do they negotiate between formal military systems and informal local networks to address challenges such as IEP continuity, extracurricular opportunities, or school placement? These questions remain underexplored in literature, limiting our ability to fully understand the dynamics of social capital in military contexts.

To address these gaps, a comparative analysis with other highly mobile populations offers a valuable opportunity to understand how social capital operates in transient communities. For example, immigrant families often leverage ethnic networks to access educational resources, while refugees rely on resettlement agencies and community organizations to adapt to new

environments. Foster families frequently depend on informal networks and alumni groups to overcome systemic barriers. These examples provide a roadmap for examining how military families might similarly rely on both formal and informal networks, adapting strategies to meet their unique challenges.

By examining parallels and differences between military families and other mobile groups, we can better understand the role of social capital in fostering resilience and stability. For instance, the concept of “weak ties” (Granovetter, 1973), which facilitates access to information and opportunities outside immediate networks, has been shown to be critical for immigrants and refugees navigating new environments. Military families might similarly benefit from these connections, particularly when relocating to unfamiliar areas. Additionally, insights from other groups discuss the importance of bridging and linking social capital in accessing formal resources, such as schools, healthcare systems, and government programs.

This comparative approach not only highlights strategies that could be applied to military families but also deepens our understanding of the systemic barriers that transient populations face. By analyzing how other groups overcome similar obstacles, we can identify actionable pathways for enhancing support systems and reducing inequities for military families.

Comparative Analysis with Other Highly Mobile Groups

The experiences of military families in leveraging social capital can be meaningfully compared to those of other highly mobile groups, such as immigrants, refugees, people experiencing homelessness or those in foster care. These groups face similar challenges in adapting to new environments, emphasizing the universal relevance of social capital across varying contexts (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Chumo et al., 2023; Melkman & Benbenishty, 2018; Menjivar, 2000; Portes, 1998; J. Wu & Sun, 2020; Zhou & Kim, 2006).

In exploring the utilization of social capital among these groups, research highlights the importance of both formal and informal networks in establishing stability and continuity for all groups. For example, Zhou and Kim (2006) examine how immigrant families leverage community networks to access educational resources for their children, emphasizing that “social capital from within ethnic communities plays a pivotal role in the educational attainment of immigrant children” (p. 45). This insight parallels the experiences of military families, for whom personal networks, assistance from military bases, and insights from families with previous postings are invaluable (Mancini et al., 2018; O’Neal et al., 2020).

The application of social capital extends beyond educational decisions. Highly mobile groups often rely on these networks for emotional support, practical assistance, and cultural integration, highlighting the diversity of social capital's impact. For instance, an analysis by Adler and Kwon (2002) on international business families reveals that “the strength of weak ties becomes apparent in the global mobility context, where acquaintances and community connections can provide unexpected support and resources” (p. 110). This perspective enriches our understanding of how military families, similarly, benefit from the breadth of their networks.

However, the challenges associated with equity in resource access and the integration of formal and informal support systems are not unique to military communities. Portes and Rumbaut (2014) discuss how disparities in social capital among immigrant groups affect their access to community services, mirroring the issues faced by military families as highlighted by Corry et al. (2021). The transient nature of these populations disrupts established networks, creating vulnerabilities such as isolation and difficulty accessing institutional resources; challenges shared across all highly mobile groups (Borah & Fina, 2017; Cederbaum et al., 2014; Fenning, 2021; Flake et al., 2009; O’Neal et al., 2020; Richardson et al., 2011).

Given these parallels, examining the strategies employed by other highly mobile groups provides a valuable lens for understanding how military families might effectively leverage social capital. By drawing from a more comprehensive database, we can better understand the challenges and strategies used by these groups and apply these lessons to support the educational needs of military families and other transient populations. This analysis focuses on three key themes: (1) the role of bridging social capital in accessing educational opportunities, (2) how bonding social capital fosters community resilience, and (3) the double-edged nature of linking social capital in navigating formal networks.

Navigating Resources: Bridging Social Capital in Accessing Educational Opportunities

For highly mobile populations, including migrants, refugees, and foster families, leveraging social capital is essential for navigating transitions and accessing resources. Granovetter's (1973) concept of weak ties - casual connections that extend beyond immediate networks, provides a foundational framework for understanding how these populations use social capital to bridge gaps in access to information and opportunities. According to Granovetter (1973), "Such weak ties...are indispensable to individuals' opportunities and to their integration into communities" (p. 1378). These ties often act as conduits to essential services, community networks, and educational resources, which may not be accessible through immediate, stronger connections.

For example, research shows that migrants and refugees frequently rely on informal networks built on weak ties to access housing, employment, and education (Bakker et al., 2016). Similarly, foster families navigate complex social service systems with support from weak ties in alumni groups and online communities, which provide shared knowledge and resources critical for stability and care (Geiger & Beltran, 2017; Greeson et al., 2020). For military families, weak

ties play a comparable role during relocations, facilitating access to information about local schools, extracurricular programs, and community resources. These connections can be particularly valuable in addressing immediate needs, such as school choice or childcare, that formal networks may not fully cover.

Digital Social Capital: Leveraging Technology for Resource Access

Building on the concept of weak ties, digital platforms have become vital tools for sustaining social capital in mobile populations. Diminescu's (2008) concept of the "connected migrant" highlights the role of ICTs in maintaining social networks across distances. Social media platforms, in particular, serve as critical spaces for navigating new environments, facilitating access to educational resources, and fostering connections with local communities (Komito, 2011; Udwan et al., 2020).

For instance, Syrian refugees in the Netherlands have used social media platforms to connect with support networks and educational resources during resettlement, emphasizing the role of digital practices in fostering resilience (Udwan et al., 2020). Similarly, transnational families use ICTs to sustain ties with their home communities, ensuring continuous access to cultural and educational resources despite physical separation (Wilding, 2006). Military families often use these same technologies to access localized knowledge about schools, neighborhoods, and extracurricular activities prior to relocating, mitigating some of the uncertainty associated with frequent moves. Online platforms bridge gaps between formal and informal networks, ensuring continuity in resource access. Although the successes of digital social capital are evident in other highly mobile populations, understanding how military families specifically use these tools can provide valuable insights into enhancing these support networks, and

understanding how and why these networks may be preferred over traditional formal networks provided by the military.

Harnessing Bonds: The Role of Bonding Social Capital in Strengthening Support Networks

Bonding social capital plays a crucial role in supporting highly mobile populations, by fostering mutual aid, shared values, and community resilience. Through mechanisms like value introjection, bounded solidarity, and enforceable trust, these groups develop strong social networks that provide educational resources, emotional support, and stability amid frequent transitions. By examining how other mobile communities leverage these forms of social capital, we can better understand how military families navigate educational access and continuity during relocation.

Value Introjection

Within the realm of social capital, value introjection emerges as a crucial mechanism for highly mobile communities, such as immigrants, refugees, and the homeless, enabling them to navigate the complexities of frequent transitions effectively. Portes (1998) and Menjivar (2000) have highlighted how the deep internalization of shared values and norms not only fosters community cohesion but also facilitates adaptation to new environments. For instance, immigrant families often emphasize cultural traditions and education as pathways to success, leveraging community-based resources like supplementary education programs to support their children's academic prospects (Zhou & Kim, 2006).

For displaced populations, including refugees and those experiencing homelessness, the establishment of supportive community norms and mutual aid systems often springs from the principles of value introjection. Erangey (2020) illuminates the importance of social networks for refugees and asylum seekers, where shared adversities cultivate a sense of belonging and

essential mutual support. Likewise, Magan and Padgett (2021), highlight how shared adversities cultivate a sense of belonging among refugees, while Magan and Padgett (2021) demonstrate how community solidarity in shelters supports homeless populations. Military families similarly rely on shared values and norms within their tight-knit communities to provide a foundation for mutual support during relocations and transitions.

Bounded Solidarity

Bounded solidarity emerges as a vital mechanism within social capital, enabling highly mobile populations such as immigrants, refugees, and the homeless to foster resilience and communal support amidst frequent transitions. Portes (2009) describes this phenomenon as “the situational reaction of a class of people faced with common adversities” (p. 1324), highlighting how shared challenges can create strong, supportive bonds. For example, Zhao and Kim (2006) examine how Chinese and Korean immigrant families establish ethnic institutions that serve as educational resources. These institutions often offer after-school tutoring programs that address educational gaps, demonstrating how shared cultural values can prioritize education and ensure children’s academic success. Similarly, McGrath et al. (2023) illustrate how networks within homeless shelters provide educational resources and emotional support. These networks organize study groups and collaborate with volunteers to help children stay engaged in schooling despite unstable living conditions.

Zhou and Kim (2006), emphasize how immigrant and refugee communities leverage collective identity and mutual aid to support their children’s education. For instance, informal schooling systems and scholarship programs are frequently created to mitigate the disruptions caused by relocation. This reflects Portes’s (2009) observation that “the strength of group affiliation and the quality of social networks can influence economic outcomes” (p. 6).

The historical role of Jewish organizations in the United States provides another example of bounded solidarity. These organizations historically advocated for inclusion and provided educational opportunities while preserving cultural identity (Magan & Padgett, 2021). Religious communities, although no longer the primary educational providers they once were, continue to foster social capital by offering access to tutoring, scholarships, and networking opportunities, underscoring their evolving yet enduring role in supporting highly mobile families (Tyack, 1983; Wuthnow, 2009).

In foster care contexts, bounded solidarity also plays a crucial role. Research by Greeson et al. (2020) highlights the reliance of foster care alumni on “strategic friendships and networks” (p. 9) to overcome barriers such as housing instability and financial challenges. These networks often fill gaps left by formal support systems, offering continuity and guidance for post-secondary education.

Such insights into the dynamics of social capital, particularly through the lens of bounded solidarity, can offer valuable lessons for understanding how military families navigate educational resources. Similar to immigrant, refugee, homeless populations and foster care families, military families often face frequent relocations and transitions, necessitating a reliance on robust, trusted social networks and community support to access educational opportunities for their children. These findings suggest that understanding the dynamics of bounded solidarity in other highly mobile groups can shed light on how military families might build and sustain support networks to navigate frequent relocations and educational transitions.

Enforceable Trust

Enforceable trust refers to the collective norms and values that anchor communities, ensuring adherence to shared expectations in exchange for access to communal resources

(Portes, 1998). This concept is particularly evident in how refugee and immigrant families engage with their networks to navigate educational systems. For instance, Zhou and Kim (2006) describe how immigrant communities establish supplementary education centers or “Saturday schools,” supported by community donations and volunteer teaching. These centers help children learn heritage languages and cultural values while enriching their mainstream education. Similarly, refugee families often rely on resettlement agencies and community-based organizations to connect with the local education system and provide them with resources such as English as a Second Language programs (Erangey et al., 2020).

Tutoring and mentorship programs also demonstrate the role of enforceable trust. McGrath (2023) highlights how refugee children benefit from volunteer-led academic support, which fosters both academic and emotional resilience. For example, Erangey (2020) discusses a mentorship initiative where refugee children receive personalized guidance that bridges educational gaps and helps them adjust to new cultural environments.

For military families, enforceable trust is embedded in both formal and informal networks. Formal institutions like DoDEA and family readiness groups rely on shared values of duty and community responsibility to foster trust, while informal spouse networks often enforce norms of mutual aid and resource sharing. Understanding how enforceable trust enables resource access in other mobile populations can provide insights into strengthening these systems for military families, particularly in accessing educational resources during relocations.

Empowerment and Limits: The Dual Nature of Social Capital

Social capital can be both empowering and limiting, shaping the ability of highly mobile populations to integrate into new communities. Putnam (2000) and McGrath et al. (2023), highlight how social capital, when unbalanced, can perpetuate inequality and exclusion. For

instance, McGrath et al. describe how women experiencing homelessness often face exacerbated disparities within their social networks due to societal stigmatization of poverty. This “being poor can lead to exclusion” (p. 1) manifests through unequal power dynamics, which can hinder access to essential community resources. Similarly, networks with entrenched hierarchies may inadvertently isolate individuals without strong connections, reinforcing social divisions (Putnam, 2000; Sensenbrenner & Portes, 2011).

Although social capital can foster collective resilience, it may also impose constraints on individual ambitions. The phenomenon of ‘downward leveling norms,’ as observed in many immigrant communities, exemplifies how social expectations within tight-knit networks can discourage members from pursuing opportunities outside the group (Sensenbrenner & Portes, 2011). For example, family clans in San Francisco’s Chinatown historically governed assets to preserve group cohesion but also limited individual mobility (Sensenbrenner & Portes, 2011).

In military communities, these dynamics may manifest as rank-based hierarchies or disparities in access to resources. Higher-ranking families often have broader networks and financial flexibility, while enlisted families may rely heavily on bonding social capital within their immediate community, potentially limiting access to bridging or linking opportunities. Recognizing the dual nature of social capital is essential for designing equitable support systems that empower all military families while minimizing exclusionary dynamics.

Residential Stability and Affluence: Unequal Access to Resources

Housing and neighborhood stability play a critical role in fostering social capital and influencing access to resources for highly mobile families. Stable, affluent neighborhoods often provide the conditions necessary for robust social networks and collective efficacy. Chaskin (1997) emphasizes that “residential stability is closely linked to the richness of community life”

(p. 37), where long-term relationships enable access to shared resources. Similarly, Sampson et al. (1997) illustrate how stable and affluent neighborhoods enhance community cohesion, creating environments conducive to mutual support and resource sharing.

However, not all communities have equal access to these conditions. Yosso (2005) describes how Communities of Color build “community cultural wealth” to overcome systemic disadvantages, leveraging aspirational, navigational, and familial capital to access critical resources. While these networks provide resilience, less affluent neighborhoods often lack the broader connectivity seen in wealthier areas, limiting opportunities for integration and mobility (Sampson et al., 1997).

For military families, frequent relocations often disrupt the stability necessary for building local social capital. Many junior enlisted people face significant financial constraints often falling at or near the poverty line with limited savings, making homeownership a challenge. Frequent moves also hinder military spouses from maintaining consistent employment, further straining financial resources. Although base housing can offer some continuity, the shortage of Navy housing in San Diego forces many families to seek accommodations far from installations, often beyond reasonable commuting distances to find affordable options. These challenges underscore the critical need to understand the unique obstacles faced by enlisted families and to identify resources that can help minimize educational disruptions for their children.

Application of Social Capital in Military Families

Military families depend on a dual network structure comprising formal support systems, such as the DoDEA and military readiness groups, and informal networks built through spouse-led organizations and peer interactions. Formal structures provide vital resources, such as guidance on transferring IEPs and accessing localized educational support, ensuring some degree

of continuity despite frequent moves (Esqueda et al., 2012). For example, DoDEA's standardized approach to special education services allows military families to secure consistent accommodation, even as they transition between states with varying policies.

In addition to formal structures, informal networks play an equally critical role. These networks, often sustained through social media platforms and community connections, provide real-time, practical assistance. Spouse-led organizations like the National Military Spouse Network foster trust and reciprocity, helping families share localized knowledge and address immediate needs. For instance, Borah et al. (2017) highlighted how military spouses use Facebook groups to gather information on schools and neighborhoods before relocating, mitigating some of the stress associated with frequent moves. Such platforms foster trust, reciprocity, and a sense of belonging within new communities, complementing the resources offered by formal systems. There is indication however, that not all spouses have access to or choose to use social networks. I personally have shut down my social media accounts several times over the course of my military career and as a spouse because of political or professional reasons. Disparities in access to and utilization of these networks require closer examination.

Challenges and Inequities in Social Capital Access

Despite the availability of formal and informal support networks, not all military families benefit equally. Factors such as rank, socioeconomic status, and geographic location often dictate the quality and extent of resources available. Enlisted families face greater barriers, including limited access to housing near installations and financial strain, which can hinder their ability to leverage both formal and informal networks effectively. Corry et al. (2021) emphasize that higher-ranking officers' families benefit from more robust support systems, including stronger

connections within military leadership and greater financial flexibility, highlighting systemic inequities.

Frequent relocations further disrupt established networks and complicate the process of forming new connections, especially in areas with fewer military installations or less integrated civilian communities. In their study on military spouses, Finkel et al. (2003) note that the psychological well-being of families often hinges on the strength of their social connections post-relocation. The Blue Star Families (2021) report further reveals that only 29% of military spouses feel a sense of belonging in their civilian communities, underscoring the isolation many families experience despite the presence of formal support systems.

Relocating to a new area can be an overwhelming experience. Without established connections, you're forced to start from scratch, unable to simply call someone for help. The Navy does not proactively provide assistance, leaving families to navigate the process on their own, advocating for themselves and seeking out resources. This becomes even more challenging when a spouse is deployed or frequently traveling, which is often the case. Adding to stress, bureaucratic obstacles can make accessing available resources even more difficult, creating the perfect storm that discourages families from reaching out for support. It's crucial to understand these barriers, explore why some individuals successfully navigate them, and identify ways to ensure that all families can benefit from the resources available.

Case Studies and Examples

Military families face unique educational challenges stemming from frequent relocations, which disrupt continuity and stability for their children. Although no study specifically examines how Navy spouses navigate formal and informal networks to access educational resources, existing research on military families provides a foundation for exploring this gap. These studies

illustrate the critical role of social capital, rooted in trust, reciprocity, and relationships, in mitigating the challenges of mobility, but they leave significant questions unanswered, particularly regarding Navy families and their distinct experiences.

Corry et al. (2021) highlight the importance of social networks in easing relocation-related stress and fostering positive educational outcomes for children. Their findings reveal that strong, supportive communities, often formed through shared experiences and mutual aid, help military families navigate local education systems. Informal networks of military spouses frequently serve as vital conduits for information about schools and local resources, yet the variability in these networks highlights inequities in access.

Borah and Fina (2017) explore broader challenges faced by military spouses, such as frequent relocations, career disruptions, and emotional stress, emphasizing their reliance on both in-person and online networks to share resources and maintain connections during transitions. Platforms like Facebook play a pivotal role in helping spouses address relocation challenges, yet these informal networks can be limited by misinformation and uneven support. The study also addresses the value of culturally competent providers who understand military life, enhancing trust and reciprocity underpinning these networks. However, it stops short of exploring how spouses manage the specific educational needs of their children.

Building on this, Finkel et al. (2003) examine the proactive role of military spouses, particularly mothers, in utilizing both formal and informal networks to ensure their children's educational and emotional needs are met. The study highlights the critical interplay between structured military support systems and peer-led initiatives, demonstrating the adaptability of spouses in bridging gaps left by formal networks. These findings reveal the complexity of

navigating educational resources in highly mobile environments but do not address the nuances of Navy family experiences, or local challenges.

O'Neal et al. (2020) further delve into how military families leverage social capital to manage stressors such as frequent relocations and separations. Their research identifies community connections as essential for fostering trust and resilience. These networks often compensate for shortcomings in formal systems, enabling families to build a sense of stability despite constant change. However, like the previous studies, O'Neal et al. (2020) do not explore how these dynamics play out specifically among Navy families or how systemic barriers might impact their access to educational resources.

Addressing the Research Gap

Although existing studies provide valuable insights into the role of social capital in supporting military families, they leave significant questions unanswered, particularly regarding Navy families. Research tends to generalize findings across military branches or rely on cross-sectional data, which limits the understanding of the distinct cultural and structural factors that shape Navy families' experiences. Furthermore, the absence of longitudinal and localized studies leaves gaps in understanding how social capital evolves and impacts families over time.

This study addresses these gaps by focusing on Navy families in San Diego, a major military hub. It explores how Navy spouses navigate both formal and informal networks to access educational resources, shedding light on the interplay between these networks and their role in mitigating systemic barriers. By capturing the localized and nuanced experiences of Navy families, this research fills a critical void in the literature and provides actionable insights for improving support systems for military families.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the significant challenges military families face due to frequent relocations, focusing on the educational disruptions and social adjustments required for their children. Social capital, defined as the networks, relationships, and resources that families leverage to navigate these challenges, has been highlighted as a critical factor in mitigating these impacts. Both formal structures, such as DoDEA and family readiness groups, and informal networks, like spouse-led organizations and social media communities, play vital roles in supporting military families. However, inequities persist, with factors such as rank, geography, and socioeconomic resources influencing access to and utilization of social capital.

By drawing on other highly mobile groups, such as immigrants, refugees, foster families, and individuals experiencing homelessness, this chapter has contextualized the experiences of military families. These populations face comparable challenges in maintaining stability and accessing educational resources amidst frequent transitions, and they similarly depend on social capital to navigate these obstacles. For example, immigrant families frequently turn to ethnic networks and community organizations to navigate unfamiliar systems while preserving cultural values. These comparative insights shed light on the potential strategies military families might adopt to build resilience and maintain educational continuity during transitions.

Despite these parallels, a critical gap remains in understanding how Navy families specifically navigate formal and informal networks to address educational challenges. Existing research often generalizes findings across military branches or relies on cross-sectional data, overlooking the distinct cultural and structural factors that shape Navy families' experiences. Furthermore, the absence of longitudinal studies leaves questions about how social capital evolves over time and its long-term impact on educational outcomes.

This study addresses these gaps by focusing on Navy families at a local level in San Diego, one of the largest military hubs in the United States. It examines how Navy spouses navigate both formal and informal networks to access educational resources, with particular attention to how these networks mitigate systemic barriers, or in some cases, make those barriers more pronounced. By investigating the interplay between these networks and their role in addressing inequities, the study aims to provide actionable insights for improving support systems for military families.

In addition to advancing the understanding of social capital in military contexts, this research contributes to broader conversations about highly mobile populations. It highlights the need for community-level strategies and policy interventions to strengthen social capital and reduce inequities, particularly for enlisted families who face greater challenges in accessing resources. By integrating lessons from other mobile groups and examining the unique experiences of Navy families, this study fills a critical gap in the literature and offers a foundation for future work aimed at enhancing educational stability for military children across frequent relocations.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed to explore how Navy spouses navigate formal and informal networks to secure educational resources for their children amidst frequent relocations. The study used a multiple case study approach, drawing from qualitative data collected through interviews, focus groups, and social media platforms, and guided by a theoretical framework of social capital. Additionally, this chapter presents the thematic analysis process, connecting them directly to the study's research questions and objectives.

Research Questions

The research was framed around three research questions to understand the dynamic between accessing and using educational resources within the military, or specifically Naval communities. The strategies Navy parents used to tap into and leverage these networks and the pivotal decisions made during this process were investigated, and the key figures involved in negotiating access to these resources were identified. Additionally, the study examined the breadth of educational resources available to military families in San Diego, identifying gaps and exploring the factors that contribute to these shortcomings. A critical aspect of this exploration included analyzing equity in resource access and considering variables such as rank within the Naval hierarchy. The following are the research questions and sub questions that guided the study:

2. How do parents establish and use both formal and informal networks to navigate and access resources for promoting their children's academic success following relocation?
 - a. What were the key moments of decision-making during this process?
 - b. Who are the key players in these negotiations?

- c. How are the resources negotiated?
 - d. How do Navy spouses contribute to social capital within the military community?
2. What specific educational resources are accessible to Navy spouses in San Diego through both formal and informal networks?
- e. Which resources are absent and what are the reasons behind their absence?
3. How do equity considerations unfold in the access to resources among Navy-affiliated students in San Diego, considering factors such as rank (Officer, Enlisted)?

Social Capital as a Lens for Understanding Military Families Support Networks

The social capital framework, as described by Bourdieu (2011), Coleman (1988), Putnam (2000), and Woolcock (2002), provided a nuanced understanding of the significance of social relationships and networks in securing resources and support. This theoretical lens effectively captured the motivations and mechanisms through which military spouses engage with both formal and informal networks to ensure their families' welfare, making it a pertinent choice for this research.

Social capital is characterized by key tenets such as networks of relationships, norms of reciprocity, and trust, which collectively empower individuals and groups to collaborate and achieve mutual benefits (Bourdieu, 1985; Coleman, 1988). For military families, navigating the challenges of frequent relocations and integrating into new communities necessitates reliance on these social capital tenets. The integration of social capital theory with granular exploration facilitated by a multiple case study approach positions this study to provide a detailed analysis of how military families orchestrate their support systems. It aims to highlight the proactive agency of military spouses and to critically assess the challenges and facilitators they encounter, thereby

deepening the understanding of the dynamic between individual agency and structural influences within military family life.

Data Collection

This section outlines the methodology and key considerations in collecting data for this study, which examines how Navy spouses navigate formal and informal networks to support their children's education. Insights from a pilot study involving eight military spouses in San Diego informed the design and execution of the final research. The pilot highlighted the pivotal role of social capital in navigating educational challenges and underscored issues such as reliance on informal networks, gaps in formal support systems, and socioeconomic disparities between officers and enlisted families. Guided by these findings, the data collection strategy for the main study was refined to focus exclusively on Navy spouses, ensuring a detailed and context-specific understanding of their unique experiences. This section details the study's location, participant selection, recruitment strategies, and data sources, as well as adjustments made based on the pilot study.

Location

San Diego, California, was strategically chosen as the setting for this case study due to its substantial military presence, including 60,000 K-12 dependents of military personnel (DoDEA, 2021). Murphy Canyon, a Navy-concentrated community within San Diego, provided a relevant and accessible focal point for the study. The Murphy Canyon Chapel, centrally located within this community, served as the venue for conducting focus groups, ensuring convenience for participants. Additionally, its proximity to the city's largest military installation and surrounding military housing enhanced accessibility and participant engagement, which was critical when selecting a meeting point (Yin, 2009).

To accommodate participants' needs, data collection included flexible modalities such as phone, Zoom, or in-person meetings, ensuring accessibility for military families. This adaptability reflects the methodological rigor required in case study research, ensuring depth and relevance in data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). As a military spouse with base access, my positionality played a crucial role in facilitating these interactions, fostering trust and rapport essential for authentic exploration (Chavez, 2015). By leveraging this insider perspective, the study seamlessly integrated my positionality with the case study methodology, enhancing participant engagement and the study's overall depth (Yin, 2009).

Participants Selection

A multiple case study approach was used to explore the nuanced experiences of military families navigating educational challenges. This method, valued for its ability to uncover complexities in real-world contexts, ensured an in-depth understanding of Navy spouses' strategies (Yin, 2009). Purposeful sampling identified 12 participants from varied economic backgrounds and Navy ranks (E-3 to O-6) to provide diverse perspectives, with data collection continuing until saturation was achieved (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

In the Navy, ranks are divided into enlisted personnel (E1-E9) and officers (O1-O10), reflecting different roles, responsibilities, and levels of compensation. Enlisted personnel do not require an advanced degree, whereas officers require a bachelor's degree to join. Enlisted personnel typically handle operational and technical tasks, while officers often hold leadership and strategic roles. This distinction often correlates with socioeconomic factors and access to resources, both within military systems and in civilian communities. By including participants from this rank spectrum, the study captured a wide range of experiences, providing insights into how rank influences the ability to navigate educational resources.

Additionally, the study's criteria included parents of school-aged children who had relocated to San Diego within the last three years, had recently moved from San Diego within the past year, or who had received orders to Permanent Change of Station (PCS) to San Diego, capturing insights into educational continuity and resource navigation.

The inclusion of single parents and families with children requiring IEPs enriched the data by addressing specific challenges related to educational equity (Aronson et al., 2018; Esqueda et al., 2012). Comparing similar and contrasting cases enhanced the study's external validity and generalizability, a strength of this methodology (Yin, 2009). Focus groups with all the participants provided additional depth, reinforcing emerging themes and ensuring comprehensive exploration.

Participants and Demographics

To provide a detailed overview of the participants in this study, this section introduces the Navy-affiliated families interviewed. The group includes six officer families and six enlisted families, each offering unique insights into the challenges of military life, resource navigation, and their children's educational needs. A summary of the participants and their unique characteristics can be found in Table 1. This table provides an overview of each family's rank, children's ages, and children's educational needs highlighting the diversity and complexity of the experiences shared during the study.

Table 1

Summary of Participants' Characteristics

Pseudonym	Rank	Children and ages (in years)	Children's educational needs
Violet	O1 (prior E4)	1,4,6	
Amelia	E5	2,9,11	9-year-old is autistic, 11-year-old

Pseudonym	Rank	Children and ages (in years)	Children's educational needs
Rose	E6	11, 13, 17	has ADHD and is dyslexic Oldest child has ADHD
Elliot (dual)	E7	9	
Grace	E7	14, 16	Both have autism
Eloise	E9	5,10	
Stella	O2 (prior)	7,9	7-year-old requires speech therapy
Kenzie	O3	7-year-old twins	7-year-old has ADHD, 7-year- old has spina bifida
Charlotte	O3	9,11	11-year-old is autistic and has ADHD
Miriam	O4	9, 11	
Cameron (dual)	O5	9,9,11,	
Keres	O6	8,10	

Participant Profiles

Violet (O1, prior E4): Violet is a stay-at-home parent with three children aged 1, 4, and 6. Her family relocated to San Diego, where her mother now lives with them to provide crucial support due to her husband's frequent absences. Although Violet recently became an officer's spouse, most of her experiences reflect navigating resources as an enlisted family.

Amelia (E5): Amelia, a homeschooling parent, has three children aged 2, 9, and 11. Her 9-year-old is autistic, and her 11-year-old has ADHD and dyslexia. The family recently moved to San Diego in January, where homeschooling provided educational continuity during the transition.

Rose (E6): Rose, a medical assistant, has three children aged 11, 13, and 17. Her oldest child has ADHD. Although her family has spent the majority of her husband's career in San Diego, they temporarily relocated to Japan before recently returning. Rose's eldest attends private high school for university opportunities, and her younger children attend public school.

Elliot (E7): Elliot is a dual-military spouse married to another enlisted service member. Her mother lives with the family to support their dual responsibilities and their 9-year-old child.

Grace (E7): Grace and her family relocated to San Diego 2 years ago. With two children aged 14 and 16 who are both autistic, Grace faces the challenge of living past Temecula due to high housing costs, and her husband commutes to 32nd Street Naval Base.

Eloise (E9): Eloise is a teacher and Navy spouse with two children aged 5 and 10. Her family opted for private schooling for their children, aligning with her professional role and educational priorities.

Stella (O2): Stella's family includes two children aged 7 and 9, with her youngest requiring speech therapy. Having transitioned from enlisted to officer early in her marriage, Stella works in HR and brings a blend of enlisted and officer perspectives to her experiences.

Kenzie (O3): Divorced from a Navy service member and now an Army reservist, Kenzie has 7-year-old twins. One of her children has ADHD, and the other has spina bifida. Her insights reflect the challenges of navigating resources as a single parent without the formal "dependent" status.

Charlotte (O3): Charlotte is a stay-at home wife and recent former Navy spouse with two children aged 9 and 11. Her oldest child is autistic and has ADHD. Although her husband retired 4 months prior to the interview, Charlotte offers extensive insights from 10 years as a Navy dependent, during which her family relocated five times.

Miriam (O4): Miriam, a teacher, has two children aged 9 and 11. Currently preparing to move to San Diego, she offers a unique perspective as the only prospective mover in the group.

Cameron (O5): Cameron, a dual-military spouse married to another O5, has three children aged 9 (twins) and 11. His mother lives with them, providing vital childcare support to help balance the demands of their dual military careers.

Keres (O6): Keres, a stay-at-home parent, has two children aged 8 and 10 who attend public school. She has lived in San Diego for 2 years, and although her family does not face extraordinary circumstances, her experiences reflect a traditional Navy family structure.

Recruitment

Recruitment strategies leveraged my insider position as a military spouse to access established networks. Social media groups such as “Military Wives of San Diego” and “Navy Spouses San Diego” were used alongside recommendations from ombudsmen and snowball sampling, where one participant recommended another, to reach participants (Naderifar et al., 2017). This approach also used existing relationships to engage diverse populations, a common strategy in case study research (Yin, 2009). By employing these methods, the study captured a broad spectrum of experiences and challenges faced by Navy spouses in navigating educational and social resources.

Sources of Data

Data was collected through in-depth interviews, focus groups, and digital network analysis. A summary of Facebook groups used in this study consisting of members greater than 2000 can be found in Table 2. These complementary methods allowed for a comprehensive exploration of both formal military resources and informal spouse-led networks.

Table 2

List of Local Facebook Groups Accessed: Bolded Font Indicates Groups Used in This Study

Group (SAN DIEGO, MILITARY, NAVY, SPOUSE, CHILDREN, NAVAL, ENLISTED, OFFICER,)	Number of members
Female Navy Officers	12k
Navy Spouses San Diego	8.3k
San Diego military spouses' group	9.9K
Scripps/Poway Area Officer Spouses	571
San Diego Military Spouses (Coronado, North Island, MCRD, MCAS Miramar)	2.8K
When you're tired of military spouses but you're a military spouse-no rules	37.5k
Military wives and girlfriends	13k
Navy wives of San Diego <3	6.7k
MCAS Miramar Military Spouses	2.9k
Navy Wives of San Diego	4.0k
San Diego Military Spouses	3.7k
San Diego Military Mommas	1.1k
USMilitary Families PCS to San Diego	4.7k
San Diego Military Spouse Community Outreach	467
Military wives/Fiancé/Girlfriends of SAN DIEGO	646
San Diego Military Families of Special Needs Children	151
San Diego Military Spouses	842
Military Families Renting or Buying in San Diego	1.1k
Navy Families in San Diego	2.4k
Coronado military families	2k
San Diego Military Spouses Unplugged Village	405
San Diego Navy Officers Spouses	3.2k

Interviews provided detailed personal narratives, focus groups offered collective insights and dynamics, and digital analysis revealed patterns of interaction within online communities.

Together, these approaches enabled the triangulation of perspectives, a method Yin (2009) emphasized as critical for achieving depth and validity in qualitative research. Table 3 outlines the alignment between the study's research questions, data sources, and analytical methods, showcasing the structured framework used to examine social capital dynamics in military families.

Table 3

Summary of Methodology for Each Research Question

Research questions	Sources of data – Methods	Data analysis
1. How do parents establish and use both formal and informal networks to navigate and access resources for promoting their children's academic success following relocation? 1a. What were the key moments of decision making during this process? 1b. Who are the key players in these negotiations? 1c. How are the resources negotiated? 1d. How do Navy spouses contribute to social capital within the military community?	• Semi structured interviews (1 on 1) with parents • Focus groups with military advocates (FRG, Ombudsman, Military Liaison) • Digital networking analysis • Member checks	• Triangulation among focus groups, interviews, and digital analysis • Cross-analysis of different parents' perspectives • Data analysis through a participatory approach
2. What specific educational resources are accessible to military spouses in San Diego through both formal and informal networks? 2a. Which resources are absent and what are the	• Semi structured interviews (1 on 1) with parents • Focus groups with • Military advocates presenting on resources available (pre and post discussion in focus group)	• Triangulation among focus groups, interviews, and digital analysis • Data analysis through a participatory approach

Research questions	Sources of data – Methods	Data analysis
reasons behind their absence?	● Digital networking analysis of used social media platforms ● Member checks	
3. How do considerations of equity unfold in the access to resources among military-affiliated students in San Diego, taking into account factors such as rank (Officer, Enlisted)	● Semi structured interviews (1 on 1) with parents ● Focus groups ● Member checks	● Triangulation among focus groups, interviews, and digital analysis ● Data analysis through a participatory approach

Participant Interviews

The research process began with initial interviews designed to build rapport and foster trust with participants, a foundational step for gaining deeper insight into the social networks and dynamics under investigation. This approach aligned with Putnam's (2000) emphasis on trust and reciprocity as central elements of social capital. Following these interviews, member checks were conducted selectively with participants representing distinct cases. This methodological strategy not only enhanced the accuracy and credibility of the qualitative data but also allowed participants to review and refine my interpretations of their narratives, which promoted collaborative and reflexive research practices (Creswell & Miller, 2000). By focusing member checks on targeted cases, the study ensured the findings authentically represented participants' experiences and perspectives, ultimately strengthening the validity and reliability of the research.

Focus Groups

Following the initial interviews, I conducted a series of focus groups with military spouses and representatives from key military support entities, including Fleet and Family Readiness Center, Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society (NMCRS), ombudsman, and military

liaison. These organizations play pivotal roles in supporting Navy families. Fleet and Family provides services such as relocation assistance, educational support, and mental health resources (Navy Life SW, n.d.) and the NMCRS offers financial relief and educational opportunities (NMCRS, 2024). The Ombudsman serves as a vital liaison between the command and Navy families, and the Military Liaison addresses educational needs during and after relocation (Military OneSource, 2024). Though the Navy provides many other services, my experience as a seasoned veteran and military spouse highlights these as the most influential stakeholders in resource navigation.

Conducted from August to November, 2024, these focus groups accommodated both in-person and virtual participation, which ensured accessibility and inclusivity (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Yin, 2009). As the facilitator, I guided the discussions, beginning with presentations on navigating military resources and transitioning into open dialogues where spouses could share experiences, challenges, and suggestions for improving resource accessibility (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This format fostered a rich exchange of perspectives, offering insights into how Navy families navigate both formal and informal networks.

Guest speakers from military support services enhanced the sessions by providing detailed overviews of available resources and fostering dialogue to increase participants' understanding and engagement. These focus groups aimed to gather data while also empowering participants, creating an informative and collaborative environment where they could learn from one another and address shared challenges. By combining data collection with community engagement, this approach aligns with Creswell and Poth's (2016) emphasis on participant involvement and the coconstruction of knowledge. Ultimately, these sessions aimed to generate

rich insights and foster mutual support, advancing the study's goal of improving understanding and accessibility of military resources.

Digital Data Analysis

This case study analyzed Navy-affiliated social media platforms, focusing on Navy Spousal Facebook groups in San Diego with memberships exceeding 3,000. The research examined education-related posts and resources shared over the past two years, offering insights into the academic support systems available to military parents. Aligned with Yin's (2009) emphasis on triangulating data sources and Creswell and Poth's (2016) guidance on purposeful site selection, this approach identified the nature of educational support provided within these online communities and highlighted existing gaps. The findings aimed to inform strategies for improving support systems for military families navigating educational challenges

Ethical Considerations, Consent, and Anonymity

In this case study, safeguarding participants' data and maintaining confidentiality were paramount. To ensure participant privacy, all identifiable information was replaced with pseudonyms, consistent with the guidelines set forth by Yin (2009) for case study research. For both digital and physical data, secure storage methods have been employed, involving locked cabinets, a strategy emphasized by White and Cooper (2022) for upholding ethical standards in research. Access to the data will be strictly limited to myself, ensuring all confidentiality protocols are meticulously followed, a measure highlighted by Stake (1995) as crucial for ethical research practices. Participants were fully informed about how their data will be used, stored, and protected through the consent process, ensuring transparency as Creswell and Miller (2000) recommended. This involved creating detailed information sheets and consent forms to clearly communicate the study's purpose, methods, potential risks, and benefits, as well as participant

rights, including confidentiality and the freedom to withdraw at any time. A copy of these forms can be found in Appendix A. Prior to participation, I briefed each participant, reviewing these documents, ensuring they fully understood the study and agreed voluntarily. Consent was then obtained through signed forms, with participants receiving copies for their records. The process emphasized ongoing consent, allowing participants to withdraw at any stage without penalty, thereby safeguarding their rights and ensuring ethical research practices. Finally, the research protocol, including data protection plans, was submitted for review and approval by an institutional review board to ensure compliance with ethical and regulatory standards, reinforcing my commitment to ethical research practices.

Acknowledging Bias

In conducting this study, it was essential to acknowledge and address potential biases inherent in the research design and participant selection process. Recognizing these biases influenced various stages of the study, from participant selection to data interpretation. Strategies were implemented to minimize their impact and enhance the study's validity. To counteract selection bias, efforts were made to ensure a diverse participant pool that reflected a broad spectrum of experiences within the military spouse community. His approach aimed to ensure the findings were reflective of the community's diversity and not limited to a specific subgroup (Bryman, 2016). Additionally, employing a variety of data collection methods helped mitigate the risk of researcher bias. This multifaceted approach ensured the study's conclusions were not merely reflections of the researcher's preconceptions but were grounded in the participants' lived experiences (Maxwell, 2012).

In the analysis, confirmation bias was carefully monitored by diligently examining data for evidence that both challenged and supported initial understanding. This balanced approach

was crucial in mitigating bias and ensuring a thorough exploration of the phenomena under study, as highlighted in the methodology of case study research (Yin, 2009). Techniques such as triangulation, engaging with multiple data sources, and member checking, which involved participants in validating findings, were integral to the methodology. These practices reinforced the study's credibility by confirming the findings through various lenses (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Use of ChatGPT as a Tool for Triangulation

ChatGPT, defined as “a Natural Language Processing (NLP) model that can generate conversation-style responses to user input” (Gilson et al., 2022, p. 1), was integrated into this study as a strategic tool to enhance qualitative data organization, synthesis, and iterative analysis. Its application was particularly valuable in supporting the thematic coding process, as the study involved analyzing several large databases of information. ChatGPT assisted in identifying gaps in understanding, clarifying patterns within the data, and structuring findings in a coherent and precise manner. Its capacity for real-time support aligned with the assertion that “on-demand support is a crucial aspect of effective learning, particularly for students who are working independently or in online learning environments” (Fuchs, 2023, p. 2). This adaptability proved essential in managing the complexities of the study and ensuring continuity and coherence across the analysis.

By cross-referencing ChatGPT outputs with manual coding and analysis, the study employed triangulation to reduce researcher bias and enhance rigor. Specifically, ChatGPT was utilized to refine narrative summaries, validate themes, and provide alternative formulations for identified patterns. These outputs were critically reviewed and verified against my own interpretations and analyses, ensuring that the findings remained grounded in the interpretative

lens central to qualitative inquiry. At no point did ChatGPT replace my voice; rather, it served as an additional point of reference to strengthen the analysis.

The inclusion of ChatGPT demonstrated a commitment to methodological innovation, showcasing how artificial intelligence can be leveraged responsibly to augment, rather than compromise, the depth and validity of qualitative research. This integration highlighted the evolving role of digital tools in research while adhering to ethical guidelines and maintaining researcher reflexivity throughout the analytical process ((Fuchs, 2023; Gilson et al., 2022).

Pilot Study - Purpose and Adjustment to the Main Study

To assess the feasibility of a study on how military families manage educational resources amid frequent moves, I conducted a pilot study with eight military spouses in San Diego. This initial research included spouses from various branches, aiming to identify differences in their resource utilization strategies. Findings indicated an active approach in seeking out resources, emphasizing the crucial role of social capital in this process. These findings are aligned with literature that highlights the importance of both formal and informal networks in overcoming challenges like education access, healthcare continuity, and variable social support (Blue Star Families, 2021; Corry et al., 2021; O’Neal et al., 2020).

The lessons learned from the pilot study were instrumental in shaping the design of the final research study. Based on the pilot findings, I observed military spouses relied heavily on informal networks and a “learn as you go” approach, highlighting gaps in the effectiveness of formal support systems like military liaisons. Participants raised concerns about the quality of education in certain districts, difficulties accessing necessary medical and educational resources, and feelings of being unsupported by their command after relocation. These insights underscored

the importance of examining the role of social capital and how military families navigate educational challenges.

To address these issues, I decided to refine the focus of my study in several ways. First, I narrowed the scope to exclusively include Navy spouses. This decision was informed by the pilot studies indicating that cultural, operational, and resource-based differences between military branches could dilute the specificity and depth of the analysis. By concentrating on Navy families, I aimed to provide a more detailed and nuanced understanding of their unique experiences.

Second, I expanded the focus on informal networks and their pivotal role in helping families mitigate challenges. The pilot revealed many spouses turned to social media platforms, acquaintances, and weak ties for resource navigation. Therefore, the final study incorporates a deeper exploration of these networks and their interplay with formal systems to provide a comprehensive picture of resource utilization.

Third, the pilot highlighted socioeconomic disparities between officers and enlisted families, particularly regarding school choice and educational opportunities. Officer families had greater financial flexibility to enroll their children in private schools or reside in top-performing districts, while enlisted families often faced more constrained options. This finding led me to include a broader representation of socioeconomic backgrounds, focusing on Navy ranks E-3 to O-6, to better capture the diverse experiences and inequities within the military community.

Finally, I decided to focus on the processes and strategies spouses use to navigate both formal and informal networks to support their children's education. This emphasis reflects the challenges identified in the pilot study, such as ineffective formal networks and difficulties accessing quality education, and ensures the study contributes meaningful insights into how

social capital facilitates educational continuity for military families. These adjustments to the study design directly address the challenges and gaps highlighted by the pilot, ensuring the final research provides a robust and actionable understanding of Navy spouses' experiences in navigating educational resources amid frequent relocations.

Data Analysis

This research used a multiple-case study design to deeply investigate the educational resource navigation strategies of 12 Navy families. The approach, as described by Yin(2009), emphasizes exploring multiple cases to discern patterns and derive broader insights. Each case captured unique yet interconnected narratives, focusing on aspects such as network utilization, decision-making processes, resource negotiation, and equity considerations. The use of a multiple-case design, guided by the social capital framework (Putnam, 2000), enabled an in-depth exploration of how Navy spouses establish and leverage social networks to support their children's academic success.

Although the study predominantly employed a deductive approach, grounded in theoretical constructions of social capital, it also allowed for inductive flexibility to incorporate unexpected patterns and themes emerging from the data. This methodological combination ensured both a structured and dynamic analysis, capturing the complexities of military family life and the systemic factors influencing access to educational resources (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The deliberate selection of cases, guided by methodological rigor (Yin, 2009), ensured each case contribute meaningfully to the study's objectives. Insights from a pilot study informed these strategies, highlighting the need for adaptability to accommodate real-world complexities (Stake, 1995).

Strategies for Analyzing Case Study Evidence

The pilot study highlighted the adaptability of case study methods, validating the importance of strategies to address complex real-world phenomena (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). To explore the experiences of Navy families, three analytical strategies were employed:

Framework-Guided Analysis

Social capital theory provided the foundation for coding and interpreting data, focusing on constructs like trust, reciprocity, and network relationships. Open coding in Atlas.ti categorized data into conceptual labels, axial coding in Excel refined these categories and relationships, and selective coding synthesized themes. This approach balanced predefined theoretical constructs with emergent insights, ensuring alignment with the study's framework (Glaser & Holton, 2004).

In-Depth Case Descriptions and Subunits of Analysis

Each case was examined in detail, with specific subunits analyzed. This approach provided a comprehensive view of individual experiences while enabling comparisons between officer and enlisted families, highlighting the role of socioeconomic factors. The subunits analyzed included decision-making moments, equity and rank-based decisions, barriers to access, reciprocity and trust dynamics, and networks and relationships.

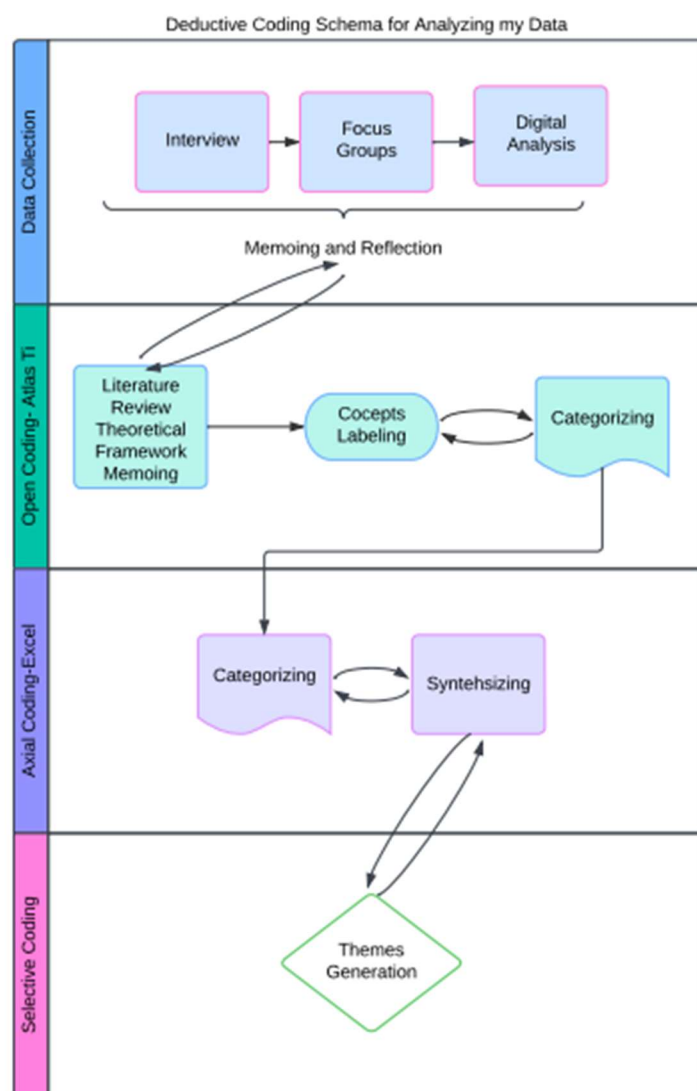
Cross-Case Synthesis

A comparative analysis across cases identified shared strategies and unique challenges. This method revealed systemic patterns, emphasizing both individual nuances and broader trends within Navy families' navigation of educational resources (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009).

Analytic Sequence and Theme Generation

The process of theme generation was central to the study, emphasizing the systematic transformation of raw data into meaningful insights. A summary of this process can be seen in Figure 1. The following approaches were used:

- **Open Coding:** Initial categorization of data into conceptual labels in Atlas.ti captured the breadth of participants' experiences. Memos and field notes were maintained throughout to record emerging patterns and nuances.
- **Axial Coding:** Data was refined and relationships among categories were identified using Excel. This step highlighted connections between constructs like trust, network types, and barriers, shaping the broader structure of the themes.
- **Selective Coding:** Final themes emerged by synthesizing categories into cohesive narratives, grounded in social capital theory. This process incorporated recurring patterns, shared vocabulary, and relationships between concepts.

Figure 1*Summary of Deductive Coding Schema***Examples of Theme Generation**

The systematic coding process led to the identification of several core themes that encapsulate the experiences of Navy families navigating educational challenges. These themes emerged from recurring patterns, shared language, and relationships between concepts identified during the analysis. By linking the theoretical framework of social capital with participants' lived

experiences, each theme provides insight into the complex interplay between trust, network dynamics, and systemic barriers. Below are key examples of theme generation, demonstrating how the coding process informed the study's findings:

- **Theme 1a: Selective Trust-Based Bonding Social Capital as a Survival Strategy**

Participants described trust-based networks as essential for navigating relocations. By analyzing how trust and familial relationships intersected, this theme was developed (see Figure 2).
- **Theme 1b: Trust in Linking Social Capital for Effective Institutional Navigation**

Data highlighted the role of linking social capital in accessing formal educational resources. Relationships with schools and educators underscored the importance of institutional trust, leading to this theme (see Figure 3).
- **Theme 2: Disconnect Between Provided and Accessed Resources**

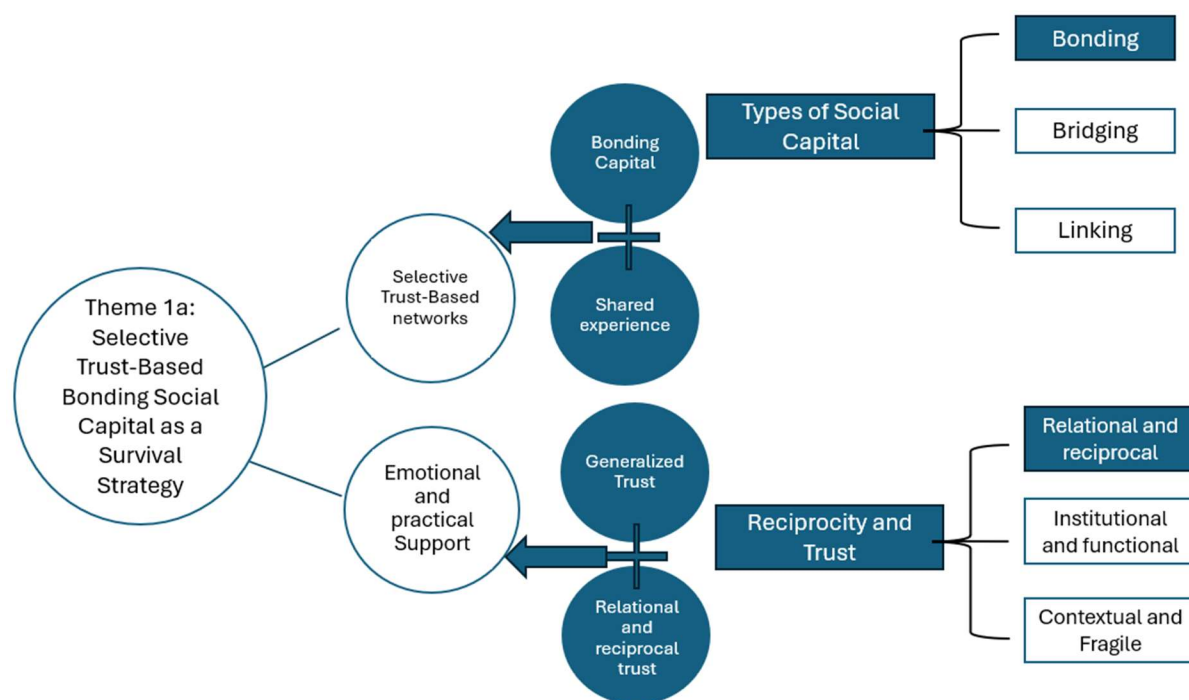
Interviews and focus groups revealed a consistent gap between available military resources and those accessed by Navy families. Factors such as perceived barriers and selective trust shaped this theme (see Figure 4).
- **Theme 3: Rank and Socioeconomic Status as a Determinant of Equity**

Comparative analysis of officer and enlisted families revealed disparities in resource access due to socioeconomic factors. This theme captured the systemic inequities tied to rank (see Figure 5).
- **Theme 4: Structural Barriers Shape Educational Decisions**

Data highlighted how external constraints—such as housing availability and school district quality—limited families' educational choices. This theme reflects the systemic influences on decision-making (see Figure 6).

Theme 1a was developed when I observed bonding social capital was primarily rooted in trust and familial relationships. By combining these two categories, it became clear military spouses often relied on selective trust-based networks for emotional and practical support. Participants overwhelmingly described these relationships as lifelines for gaining essential information and navigating new environments. This insight led to the formation of Theme 1a: *Selective Trust-Based Bonding Social Capital as a Survival Strategy*. A visual representation of how this theme was derived can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2



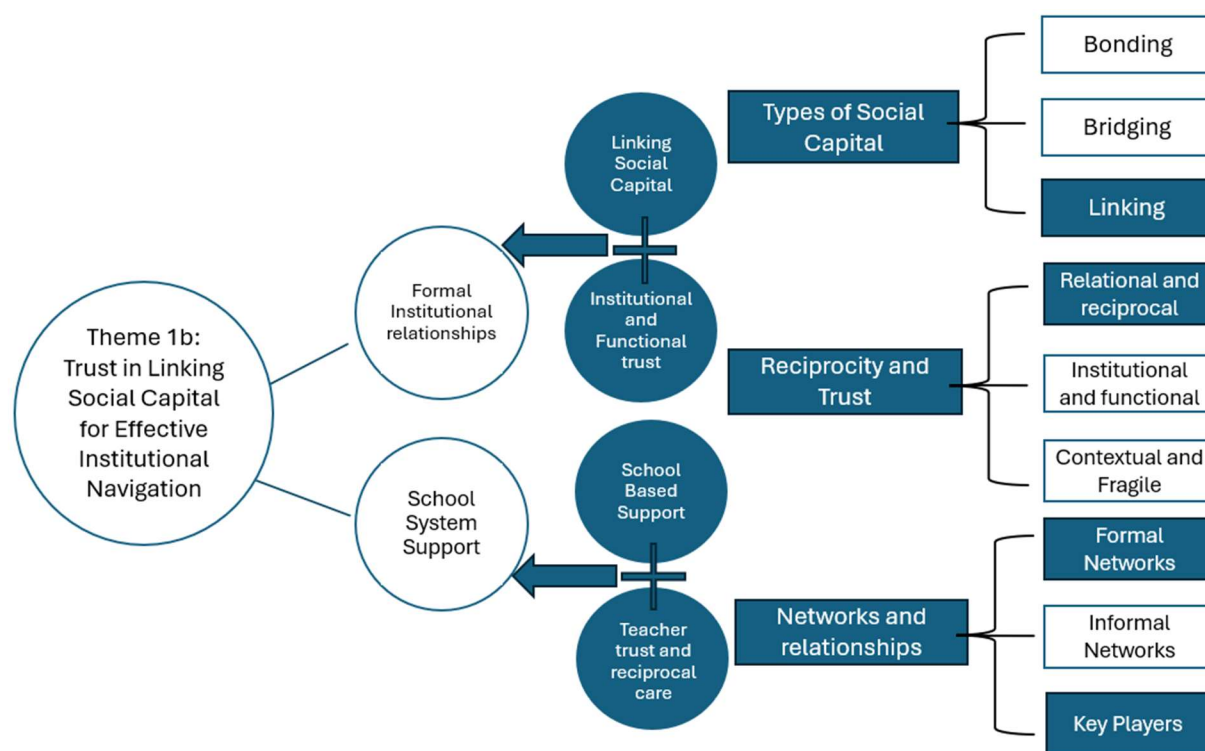
Derivation of Theme 1a: Selective Trust-Based Bonding Social Capital as a Survival Strategy

Although Themes 1a and 1b both center on social capital and trust as core values, I chose to separate them due to the distinct types of social capital observed in the data. Linking social capital emerged as the most used form of capital among Navy spouses, highlighting its critical

role in accessing resources. Trust played a particularly positive role in interactions with academic resources, such as teachers and educational institutions. Furthermore, formal academic non-Naval resources consistently appeared as the primary source of educational support, establishing them as key players in the network. By integrating linking social capital, institutional trust, and formal school support, Theme 1b was developed: Trust in Linking Social Capital is Required for Effective Institutional Navigation. A schematic illustrating the derivation of this theme is presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Derivation of Theme 1b: Trust in Linking Social Capital for Effective Institutional Navigation

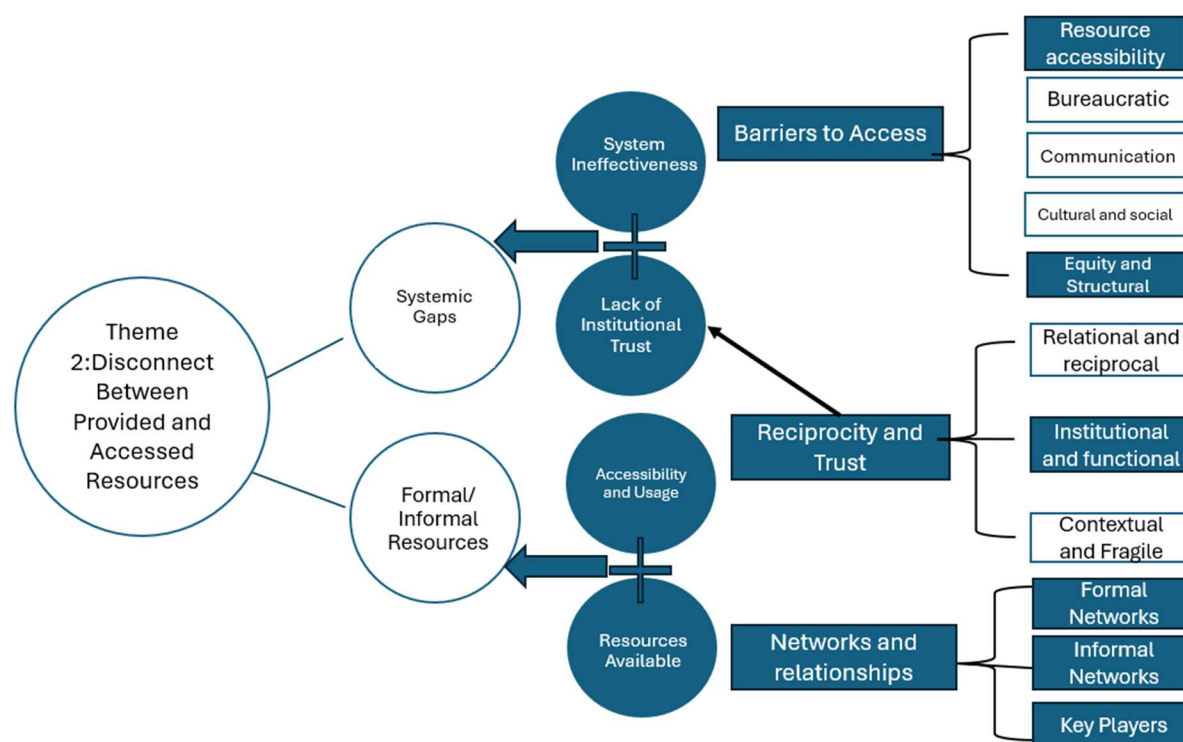


Theme 2 emerged primarily from observations during focus groups, digital analysis of Navy-only Facebook groups, and insights gathered from my interviews. A consistent pattern revealed a clear disconnect between the resources provided by the military and those actually

being accessed by Navy spouses. Further analysis substantiated this finding and will be discussed in detail in the following sections. The generation of this theme considered several factors; the barriers preventing access to certain resources, the selective trust spouses placed in some resources over others, and the specific networks spouses relied upon to navigate and secure educational resources. A summary of this theme formation along with specific codes that contributed to its development can be found in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Derivation of Theme 2: Disconnect Between Provided and Accessed Resources

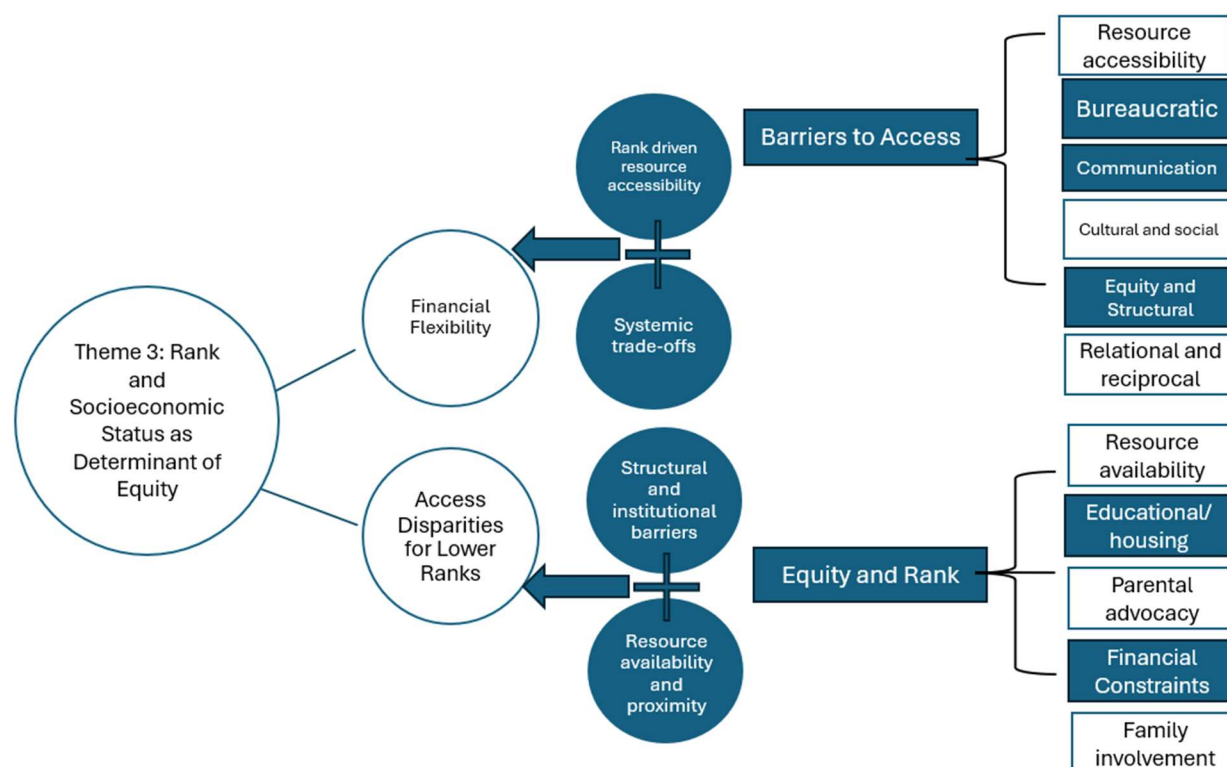


Theme 3 emerged primarily from a noticeable disconnect between the responses of officers and enlisted personnel. Because the case study was intentionally designed with an even split between these ranks, I was able to analyze the data comparatively to identify key differences. The most significant disparities were tied to socioeconomic status, influenced by

differences in pay and rank-driven accessibility to resources. This theme captures the equity considerations central to the study, focusing on systemic gaps and access disparities stemming from socioeconomic inequities among lower-ranking personnel. A visual representation of this theme and its contributing factors is provided in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Derivation of Theme 3: Rank and Socioeconomic Status as a Determinant of Equity

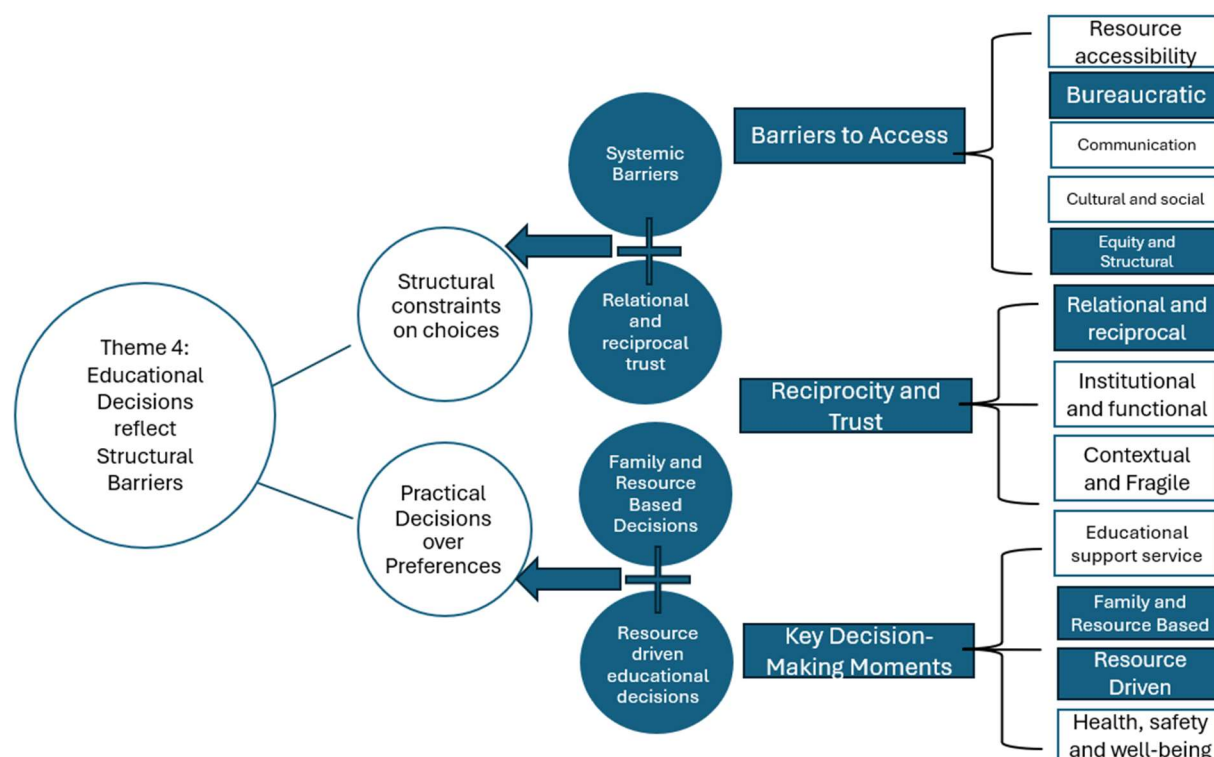


The final theme focused on how structural and systemic barriers shape educational decisions for military families. By examining factors such as access to resources, barriers to access, and trust, it became clear educational choices—such as selecting between public and private schools—are often driven by external constraints rather than parental preferences or values. Decisions are heavily influenced by structural factors like housing availability, school district quality, and rank-based benefits, which prioritize proximity and practicality over the best

educational fit. As a result, many families face limited options, making the concept of “choice” more theoretical than real. This dynamic often ties the quality of a child’s education to factors outside of a family’s control, creating long-term disparities in educational outcomes for military children. A visual schematic of the development of Theme 4 can be seen in Figure 6.

Figure 6

Derivation of Theme 4: Educational Decisions Reflect Structural Barriers



Final Themes and Coding Summary

The process of iterative coding and analysis led to the development of five comprehensive themes, as outlined above. These themes illustrate the complex ways Navy families construct and use social capital to navigate educational resources while contending with systemic barriers. Each theme is supported by multiple subthemes, summarized in Table 4, which together reflect the lived experiences and practical realities of military families. These

themes address systemic gaps, equity issues, and structural challenges, showcasing the multifaceted role of social capital in military family life.

Table 4

Summary of Themes

Example quotes	Subthemes	Description	Theme
“We all live the same kind of life, so it’s easy to trust other spouses.” – Miriam	Selective Trust-Based Networks	Close-knit networks provide emotional and practical support to overcome frequent moves and military life challenges.	Theme 1a: Selective Trust-Based Bonding Social Capital as a Survival Strategy
“You automatically have so much in common... you understand that person.” – Violet	Emotional and Practical Support	Emotional and practical assistance through relationships with other military families in similar situations.	
“The communication with the teacher was awesome... I trusted she had our kids’ back.” – Cameron	Formal Institutional Relationships	Relationships with schools, healthcare, and military systems to access formal resources and advocate for children’s needs.	Theme 1b: Trust in Linking Social Capital for Effective Institutional Navigation
“With teachers on base, they are aware of what the kids are going	School System Support	Teachers and administrators play a critical role in helping	

Example quotes	Subthemes	Description	Theme
through, so they provide good care.” – Rose		families’ transition and support children’s academic needs.	
“How come we are only just learning about these resources?” – Keres	Systemic Gaps	Differences between theoretically available resources and what families can realistically access.	Theme 2: Disconnect Between Provided and Accessed Resources
“I didn’t even know my son qualified for EFMP.” – Elliot	Formal/Informal Resources	Inconsistent or unclear communication from support systems leads to missed resource opportunities.	
“We just found a house in the best school district in San Diego, which everyone knows is Poway.” – Cameron	Financial Flexibility	Officer families typically have more financial flexibility, impacting resource access and educational choices.	Theme 3: Rank and Socioeconomic Status as Determinants of Equity
“There was just no way we could have continued paying for private education.” – Rose	Access Disparities for Lower Ranks	Enlisted families encounter financial and informational challenges in accessing resources.	
“The school districts were a large factor in	Structural Constraints on Choices	Military families’ educational choices are	Theme 4: Educational Decisions Reflect

Example quotes	Subthemes	Description	Theme
determining the area we wanted to live in.” – Kenzie		often limited by housing proximity and school district policies.	Structural Barriers
“We are looking at a Private Catholic School because the continuity in education will be there.” – Miriam	Practical Decisions Over Preferences	School choice is based more on logistics (e.g., housing availability) than on values or educational preferences.	

Analysis of Emergent Themes and Corresponding Research Questions

With the themes established, the next step was to reorganize the research questions under the theme that best aligned with each, based on data analysis and corresponding patterns. This restructuring aimed to ensure the research questions were clearly connected to the specific dynamics of social capital explored in the study. Each question is connected to a theme based on the particular aspect of social capital it addresses, whether trust-based networks, institutional navigation, barriers to resource access, equity disparities, or structural factors shaping educational decisions. This alignment creates a clear and cohesive framework for interpreting the findings and understanding their broader implications. A summary of the key themes and associated questions can be found in Table 5.

Table 5

Summary of Themes and Corresponding Research Questions

Theme	Corresponding Question
Theme 1a: Selective Trust-Based Bonding Social Capital as a Survival Strategy	Q1d. How do Navy Spouses Contribute to Social Capital Within the Military Community? Q1. How do parents establish and use both formal and informal networks to navigate and access resources for promoting their children's academic success following relocation?
Theme 1b: Trust in Linking Social Capital for Institutional Navigation	Q1.b Who are the key players in these negotiations? Q1.c How are the resources negotiated?
Theme 2: Disconnect Between Provided and Accessed Resources	Q2.a Which resources are absent and what are the reasons behind their absence? Q.2 What specific educational resources are accessible to Navy spouses in San Diego through both formal and informal networks?
Theme 3: Rank and socioeconomic status as hidden determinants of equity	Q.3 How do equity considerations unfold in the access to resources among Navy-affiliated students in San Diego, considering factors such as rank (Officer, Enlisted)?

Theme	Corresponding Question
Theme 4: Educational decisions reflect structural barriers rather than preferences	Q.1a What were the key moments of decision-making during this process?

Theme 1a: Selective Trust-Based Bonding Social Capital as a Survival Strategy

This theme focuses on how Navy spouses build close-knit, supportive networks within the military community, leveraging informal networks for resilience and mutual support during relocations. This theme also highlights the important role of trust-based resource sharing, a foundational element in fostering collaboration amongst Navy spouses. Two research questions were placed under this theme due to their alignment with the key aspects of bonding social capital and trust observed in the data. Questions are listed in the order they appear in Chapter 1.

Q1d. How do Navy Spouses Contribute to Social Capital Within the Military Community?

This question was assigned to Theme 1a because it explicitly addresses the role Navy spouses play in fostering bonding social capital through shared experiences, trust, and mutual support. Data analysis revealed spouses frequently described their networks as vital sources of emotional and practical assistance, particularly during transitions. These contributions directly illustrate the formation of selective trust-based networks as a survival strategy, making this theme the ideal fit for this question.

Q1. How do parents establish and use both formal and informal networks to navigate and access resources for promoting their children's academic success following relocation?

This question was grouped under Theme 1a because it captures the processes through which families rely on informal, trust-based networks to gain access to essential resources. The data showed spouses often turn to close-knit networks for advice and information, particularly

during times of uncertainty. These interactions highlight the critical role of bonding social capital in navigating new environments and ensuring educational continuity for their children.

Theme 1b: Trust in Linking Social Capital for Institutional Navigation

This theme captures how Navy families build and leverage trust-based relationships with formal institutions like schools and military resources, schools, and community programs to access vital resources for their children. Trust in these relationships emerges as a key factor in effectively navigating institutional systems, ensuring families can advocate for their children's needs and obtain necessary educational and social support. By focusing on formal networks, this theme sheds light on the strategic players and the trust required to make these interactions effective. Two research questions align closely with this theme, reflecting its focus on the dynamics of institutional navigation.

Q1.b Who are the key players in these negotiations?

This question fits under Theme 1b because it explores the individual and institutional actors central to facilitating resource access. Key players, such as teachers, school administrators, military coordinators, and healthcare professionals, were frequently mentioned by participants as pivotal in bridging the gap between military families and available resources. The theme captures how trust in these key players allows families to advocate for their children effectively, especially when faced with systemic challenges or new environments.

Q1.c How are the resources negotiated?

This research question complements Theme 1b by delving into the strategies and processes families use to interact with formal institutions. There was also an emphasis on trust in the data surrounding this question, particularly as a prerequisite for these negotiations. This

reinforces the central role of linking social capital in navigating complex systems and obtaining resources that are often difficult to access.

Theme 2: Disconnect Between Provided and Accessed Resources

This theme examines the gap between the resources theoretically available to Navy families and those they are able to access or use. Participants consistently highlighted barriers including communication, procedural inefficiencies, and lack of awareness or trust in formal military support systems. Additionally, this theme aims to address the reason behind the disconnect. Data analysis indicates families' reliance on informal networks, which points to possible systemic issues or perceived irrelevance of formal military support. Two research questions align closely with this theme, reflecting its focus on identifying resource gaps and barriers.

Q2.a Which resources are absent and what are the reasons behind their absence?

This question directly addresses the core of Theme 2 by investigating what resources families feel are missing from the formal support structures and why these absences exist. Responses highlighted systemic challenges, such as eligibility limitations, insufficient communication, and inaccessible or fragmented military programs. Families frequently mentioned feeling left to “figure things out” on their own due to gaps in information and support, leading to their reliance on informal networks to fill these voids.

Q.2 What specific educational resources are accessible to Navy spouses in San Diego through both formal and informal networks?

This question complements the theme by focusing on what resources families access and the networks through which they obtain them. Data revealed a distinct trend: although formal networks such as schools or military programs were sometimes used, informal networks, such as

Facebook groups or word-of-mouth from other military spouses, were often perceived as more reliable and effective. This contrast addresses the disconnect between available formal resources and what families actually use, highlighting potential systemic barriers like complexity and inefficiency.

Theme 3: Socioeconomic Status as a Hidden Determinant of Equity

This theme explores the intersection of rank and socioeconomic status and its influence on resource access within the Navy-affiliated community. It captures how disparities tied to rank create inequities in financial flexibility, housing options, and time available for advocacy. These systemic differences shape the educational opportunities available to Navy families and often leave enlisted families at a disadvantage. There is one question which aligns closely with this theme.

Q.3 How do equity considerations unfold in the access to resources among Navy-affiliated students in San Diego, considering factors such as rank (Officer, Enlisted)?

The placement of this question under Theme 3 is justified by its direct alignment with the socio-economic disparities observed in the data. This research question delves into the ways inequities based on rank manifest and affect resource access. The systemic nature of these inequities highlights the hidden but pervasive role of socioeconomic status in determining access and outcomes.

Theme 4: Educational Decisions Shaped by Structural Barriers

This theme looks at the systemic constraints that often guide educational choices for Navy families. These constraints include factors such as housing proximity, school district quality, and logistical challenges tied to frequent relocations. Unlike personal preferences or

values, these choices are often shaped by external limitations, leaving some families with little room to prioritize educational fit over practicality. There is one question guiding this theme:

Q.1a What were the key moments of decision-making during this process?

The placement of this question under Theme 4, reflects the themes focus on capturing the critical points at which families navigate educational resources upon relocation and the barriers they face. This question directly explores the factors that influence decisions, such as selecting housing in a high-performing school district or prioritizing location with the constraints of financial limitations in a high-cost area like San Diego, where the study is situated. The high cost of living in this region adds an additional layer of complexity, forcing families to balance educational priorities with economic realities.

Conclusion

In summary, this methods section outlined the comprehensive approach taken to explore how Navy spouses navigate formal and informal networks to support their children's educational success. The research design was informed by the successful completion of a pilot study, which provided critical insights into refining the research questions, participant selection, and data collection strategies. By employing a multiple-case study design, guided by the theoretical framework of social capital, the research integrated various data collection and analysis strategies to capture the nuanced experiences of Navy families in San Diego.

The detailed coding process, spanning open, axial, and selective coding, allowed for the identification of recurring patterns and the development of themes that address the study's objectives. The alignment of these methods with the social capital framework ensured a robust foundation for exploring the interplay of bonding, bridging, and linking social capital in the experiences of military families.

In Chapter four, the findings will be presented and organized under each research question and corresponding theme. These findings will highlight the key patterns, insights, and narratives derived from the data, providing a detailed account of the challenges and strategies described by Navy spouses. Additionally, Chapter four will lay the groundwork for Chapter five, where inferences and findings drawn from the data and broader implications of the study will be discussed, contributing to the understanding of social capital and resource navigation within highly mobile military populations.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL THROUGH NETWORKS

This chapter examines five themes that emerged from the study: trust-based bonding social capital as a survival strategy, trust in linking social capital for institutional navigation, disconnect between provided and accessed resources, socioeconomic status as a hidden determinant of equity, and educational decisions shaped by structural barriers. These themes reveal several critical inferences about how Navy families navigate systemic challenges to access educational resources through formal and informal networks. First selective trust is foundational to resource navigation, enabling them to manage information overload and identify credible sources within networks. Second, linking social capital is an important asset for Navy families. However, systemic barriers, like unclear communication, push families to rely on informal networks for solutions. Third, rank and financial flexibility exacerbate educational inequities, shaping access to housing and resources, especially in high-cost areas like San Diego. Finally, educational decisions are shaped more by systemic barriers than individual preferences, requiring self-advocacy and family support systems to bridge gaps and ensure stability.

The research questions driving this study focus on capturing how Navy spouses develop and use social networks to support their K-12 children's academic well-being amidst frequent relocations. Data were collected from 12 participants, each representing a unique case, split evenly between officer and enlisted ranks. The analytic approach to understanding these data was deductive coding, rooted in social capital theory and case study methodology. This approach surfaced the systemic barriers Navy families encounter and highlight how they navigate these challenges. In summary and for ease of navigation, the research questions addressed in this study and each subsequent theme can be found in Table 6.

Table 6*Summary of Themes and Corresponding Research Questions*

Theme	Corresponding Question
Theme 1a: Selective Trust-Based Bonding Social Capital as a Survival Strategy	Q1d. How do Navy Spouses Contribute to Social Capital Within the Military Community? Q1. How do parents establish and use both formal and informal networks to navigate and access resources for promoting their children's academic success following relocation?
Theme 1b: Trust in Linking Social Capital for Institutional Navigation	Q1.b Who are the key players in these negotiations? Q1.c How are the resources negotiated?
Theme 2: Disconnect Between Provided and Accessed Resources	Q2.a Which resources are absent and what are the reasons behind their absence? Q.2 What specific educational resources are accessible to Navy spouses in San Diego through both formal and informal networks?
Theme 3: Rank and socioeconomic status as hidden determinants of equity	Q.3 How do equity considerations unfold in the access to resources among Navy-affiliated students in San Diego, considering factors such as rank (Officer, Enlisted)?
Theme 4: Educational decisions reflect structural barriers rather than preferences	Q.1a What were the key moments of decision-making during this process?

Data Presentation, Analysis, and Inferences

This section presents each of the five identified themes, aligned with the corresponding research questions. For each theme, data are presented to illustrate the context and support the inferences associated with the theme. The analysis focuses on presenting raw evidence, such as participant quotes and descriptive accounts, without immediate interpretation, allowing the data

to speak for itself. Each section builds a logical connection to the overarching inferences, laying the groundwork for a deeper discussion in Chapter five.

Theme 1a: Selective Trust-Based Bonding Social Capital as a Critical Survival Strategy

This section includes an exploration of how Navy families build and use close-knit, trust-based networks as a vital strategy for navigating the challenges of military life, particularly frequent relocations. The data emphasizes how Navy spouses use informal networks to provide emotional support, practical guidance, and access to localized resources, forming the foundation of their resource navigation. This process of relying on selective trust enables families to manage the complexities of relocation while ensuring stability for their children.

Research Question 1: How do Parents Establish and Use Both Formal and Informal Networks to Promote Their Children's Academic Success Following Relocation?

Navy spouses frequently rely on informal networks as the first step in navigating a new location. Social media platforms, particularly Facebook groups, are highly valued for their convenience and the breadth of information they provide. Miriam described her approach, sharing, “I just look on Facebook for anything that I need—what schools there are, where’s the best place to go.” Similarly, Amelia explained her proactive strategy: “If we have an idea of where we are going, about six months out, I start getting online, looking at Facebook groups, looking at state laws and even school districts.” These platforms enable families to plan well in advance, offering quick and direct access to resources.

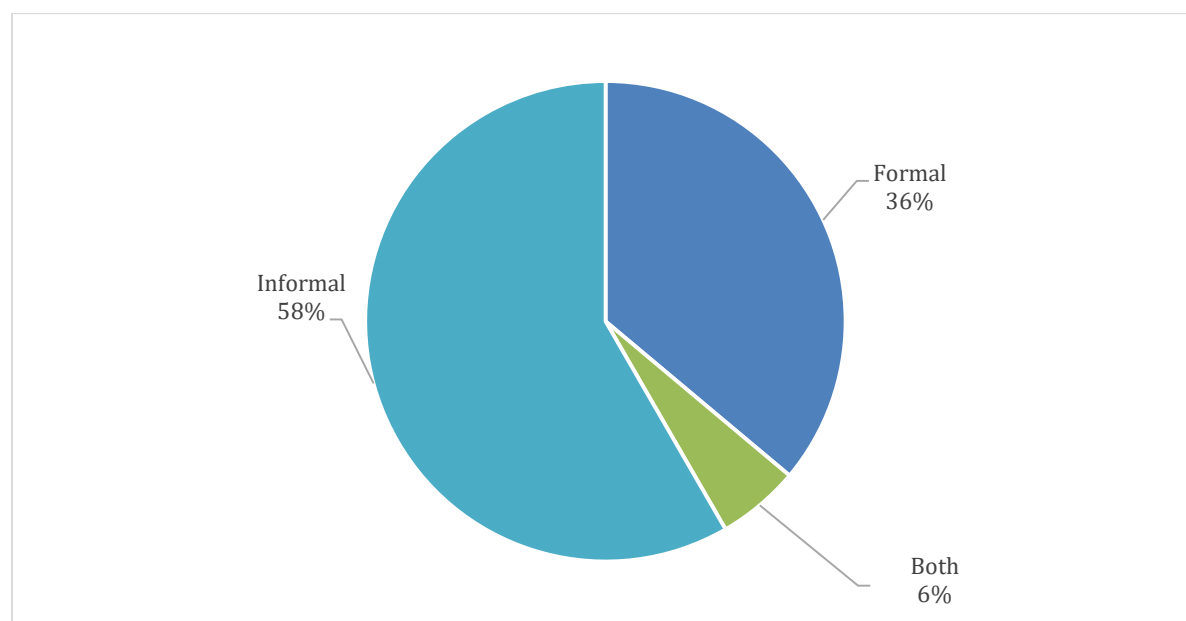
However, not all spouses found informal networks equally accessible. Grace pointed out the limitations of informal networks, noting, “I don’t have anyone but my husband and my son . . . when I look at my phone, I have no one to call.” This disparity underscores the uneven access

to robust informal networks within the military community, reflecting both the strengths and gaps in these systems.

Beyond digital platforms, in-person connections in local military communities play a significant role. Shared experiences such as relocations and deployments help foster quick trust among spouses. Violet remarked, “We are all living the same kind of life, so it is easy to trust other spouses.” Miriam emphasized the importance of these networks, adding, “I do trust Navy spouses—I think we rely on each other very heavily. Tribal knowledge is a necessary part of any move.” These personal interactions foster trust and enable families to navigate complex systems with the help of those who share similar experiences. Figure 7 indicates this preference for use of informal networks over formal networks amongst Navy Spouses.

Figure 7

Types of Networks Accessed by Navy Spouses, by Priority



Gaining “Foreknowledge” from Experienced Spouses. One of the key benefits of informal networks is the ability to gain “foreknowledge” from spouses who have previously navigated similar challenges, such as school selection or managing the IEP process. Kenzie

highlighted this value, stating, “What made it successful was having the foreknowledge, like, if somebody had told me ahead of time, this is the process you’re going to need to go through.” Such insights enable families to better anticipate potential hurdles and streamline their transitions. Amelia’s approach further illustrates this dynamic: “If we have an idea of where we are going, I start gathering information from Facebook groups and even looking at school district policies 6 months ahead of the move.” This proactive behavior highlights how informal networks empower spouses to navigate challenges with greater confidence and efficiency.

Formal Networks for Educational Support. Although informal networks serve as the starting point, formal networks, such as educators and school systems, play an essential role in addressing families’ educational needs. Cameron emphasized the importance of teacher support, saying, “The communication with the teacher was awesome. . . . I trusted that she had our kids’ back because she understood the Navy community so well and its challenges.” Trust in educators was echoed by Miriam, who remarked, “All the teachers knew who we were, all the teachers made an effort to welcome them. The school also took care of all the educational needs and supplies. They made it really easy.”

Other spouses shared their reliance on specific formal resources. Charlotte, navigating special education services for her child, said, “I started to talk to the school psychologist about where to start, and he pointed me in the right direction of getting the necessary resources for my son.” Keres shared how formal systems were critical during her husband’s deployment: “When my husband was deployed, I did speak to their school’s guidance counselor.” These examples demonstrate the pivotal role of formal networks in supporting families, particularly during transitions.

Blending Formal and Informal Networks. In many cases, informal networks serve as a bridge to formal resources, helping families navigate complex systems. Elliot emphasized, “Lean heavy on your community. There’s Facebook pages all over the place . . . rely on fellow parents that are going through the same thing that you’re going through.” Informal connections often provide the trust and guidance necessary to access formal systems effectively. Violet reinforced this dynamic, stating, “If another mom friend came to me and was like, ‘I know this great thing,’ then I would go look into it, but if somebody just hands me a brochure, I’m kind of like, ‘oh, I don’t know.’”

This blending of networks helps families overcome bureaucratic barriers and ensures that resources are accessible. Charlotte shared a positive example: “They [the school district] had a liaison . . . they moved over his IEP so seamlessly, and he had services almost immediately.” These interactions illustrate how spouses act as connectors, facilitating access to formal systems and leveraging the support of informal networks.

The data presented in this section underscores the foundational role of selective trust in helping Navy spouses navigate both formal and informal networks. These trust-based relationships empower families to manage information overload, identify credible sources, and build resilience in the face of frequent relocations. This inference will be analyzed further in Chapter five, demonstrating how selective trust shapes the broader resource navigation strategies of Navy families.

Question 1d: How Do Navy Spouses Contribute to Social Capital in the Military

Navy spouses create and sustain social capital by cultivating trust within informal networks. Miriam underscored the importance of these connections, stating, “We as military spouses rely on each other very heavily. Tribal knowledge is a necessary part of any move.”

Similarly, Stella described the strong bonds formed through discussions about relocation, noting, “With other military spouses, we do talk about moves and . . . relocating.” These networks provide emotional support and practical guidance, particularly during relocations.

Despite the strength of these networks, not all spouses engage deeply. Some encounter barriers that hinder their participation. Eloise shared her hesitance, explaining, “I don’t interact ever. I just read the article or post. I don’t even hit like or comment.” Grace highlighted a similar challenge, recounting dismissive reactions: “People would say, ‘Oh, that’s not what happened to me,’ and it becomes a debate, so now I don’t even post responses.” These interactions discourage some spouses from contributing to or seeking support within these networks, leaving them on the periphery of bonding social capital.

Connecting Families to Formal Resources. Spouses also act as connectors, facilitating access to formal systems and blending informal and formal networks. Kenzie emphasized her active involvement in schools: “Sometimes I volunteer at the school and talk to parents, letting them know if there is anything they need or need help navigating. It was so hard for me to get resources for my daughter, so I’m happy to help.” Similarly, Keres described how engaging with school staff helps her children: “I did speak to their guidance counselor to let him know their dad was on deployment. I also speak to their teachers to share information about what’s going on in our lives so they can help our kids.” These interactions demonstrate how Navy spouses contribute to social capital by bridging the divide between informal and formal systems.

In more structured contexts, Navy spouses rely on linking networks to build connections. For instance, Keres highlighted the role of Navy officers’ spouses’ clubs in creating connections: “We have one for Scripps Poway, and there’s a national spouses club. Anytime we PCS [referring to Permanent Change of Station] to a new location, one of the first things I do is find

these clubs.” These clubs create opportunities for resource sharing and community building, demonstrating how structured groups contribute to social capital.

Overcoming Barriers to Trust. Although trust is central to social capital, some spouses experience barriers or challenges in fully engaging. Violet, for example, expressed uncertainty about available resources: “Are there even resources? Like for me, I don’t even know. I just rely on friends. I feel like I don’t contribute much because I don’t even know what there is.” This lack of awareness limits contributions to broader networks. Others, like Grace, described the difficulty of building connections: “I invited some people from social media to come over to my house for food, but I only had one person show up.” Stella similarly noted, “It’s hard to build relationships because everyone is constantly coming and going.” These examples highlight the emotional risks and challenges Navy spouses face when attempting to strengthen informal networks.

Conclusion

The data presented in this section illustrates the significant role Navy spouses play in fostering social capital within the military community. By building trust-based networks and acting as connectors, they facilitate resource sharing and bridge gaps between formal and informal systems. Despite the challenges faced by some, these contributions underscore the critical role of selective trust in enabling Navy families to navigate frequent relocations and systemic barriers. This inference will be further analyzed in Chapter five, demonstrating how selective trust strengthens the collective resilience of military families.

Theme 1b: Trust in Linking Social Capital for Effective Institutional Navigation

This section examines the critical role of linking social capital—trust-based relationships with formal institutions—in helping Navy families navigate and access educational resources.

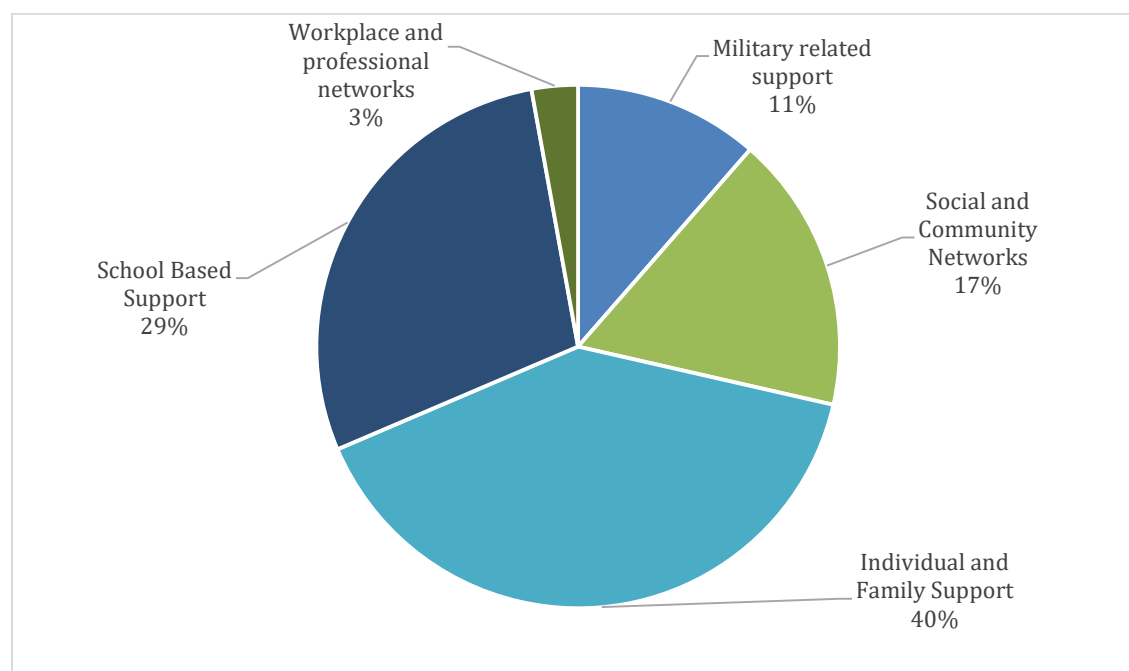
These networks, which include school-based professionals, military coordinators, social and community networks, and family or workplace supporters, act as bridges between military life and institutional systems. Despite their utility, systemic barriers, such as unclear communication, often necessitate reliance on informal networks for solutions.

Research Question 1b: Who are the Key Players in Facilitating Access to Educational Resources for Navy Families?

Key players in facilitating access to educational resources include families themselves, school-based professionals, social and community networks, military-related resources, and workplace or professional networks. Each of these groups plays a unique role in helping families navigate frequent relocations and advocate for their children's educational needs. Figure 8 summarizes the primary categories of support which will be discussed in greater detail below.

Figure 8

Key Players Military Spouses Use to Navigate Educational Resources



Individual and Family Support (40%). Families often take on a central role in navigating educational systems and providing stability during transitions or deployments. Spouses, parents, and extended family members work together to advocate for children's needs, often filling gaps left by formal systems. Rose reflected on this, saying, "We had a lot of resources when we lived on base . . . you can rely on the people who surround you." Violet also highlighted the trust within these personal networks, sharing, "Trust is high among spouses, I trust what they say." Some families extend this support network to include live-in relatives. Four of the twelve families interviewed reported having parents living with them to help with childcare and educational responsibilities, demonstrating how deeply families rely on one another to manage the unique demands of military life.

School-Based Support (28.6%). Schools are a foundational pillar in linking social capital, with teachers, guidance counselors, school psychologists, and administrators providing tailored support to military children. Cameron described a positive relationship with his child's teacher: "The communication with the teacher was awesome. . . . I trusted she had our kids' back." School psychologists provide additional assistance, addressing the emotional toll of frequent relocations and pointing families toward necessary resources. Charlotte reflected on her experience, stating, "I started to talk to the school psychologist about where to start, and he pointed me in the right direction for getting resources for my son."

Guidance counselors and military coordinators also play pivotal roles, ensuring smooth transitions by connecting families to available programs and services. Keres noted, "When my husband was deployed, I spoke to their school's guidance counselor," emphasizing the value of this direct, accessible support. Similarly, school administrators help bridge gaps by offering military-specific resources. Rose highlighted the importance of this understanding, explaining,

“With the teachers on base, they are aware of what the kids are going through and provide great care.” Together, these school-based players form a comprehensive support system, addressing both academic and emotional needs to ensure military children experience continuity and stability in their education despite frequent relocations.

Social and Community Networks (17.1%). Informal networks, including social media groups and local community connections, are critical for Navy families seeking advice, sharing resources, and building a sense of belonging in new locations. Platforms like Facebook often serve as hubs for these interactions. Amelia explained, “Facebook groups for the area . . . that is the easiest way for me to get information.” Beyond digital spaces, families also rely on in-person connections in their communities. Churches and neighbors frequently provide additional support, helping families integrate and develop meaningful relationships. Keres shared how these connections helped her family, stating, “Our church is really great, and my kids met a lot of friends there, which helped them assimilate when we first moved.” These networks, both virtual and face-to-face, provide quick, adaptive solutions to immediate challenges, support, helping families navigate challenges and build a sense of community.

Military-Related Support (11.4%). Military-related resources play a smaller, but still important role in bridging the gap between military life and educational systems. Military coordinators often act as liaisons, assisting families in addressing deployment-related challenges and advocating for continuity in their children’s education. Stella shared her experience, saying, “We tried the military liaison through the school district. We’re lucky our kids’ school had one onsite, but not all of them do.” Family readiness groups (FRGs) also provide logistical and emotional support, serving as trusted sources of information for military families. Eloise emphasized their reliability, stating, “The FRG is a very trustworthy source, as opposed to

reading everyone's comments on Facebook." Together, these resources offer specialized assistance tailored to the needs of military families, ensuring smoother transitions and greater stability during times of change.

Workplace and Professional Networks (2.9%). Though less commonly used, workplace and professional connections can provide meaningful support for military families navigating educational needs. Colleagues and coworkers often serve as informal advisors, offering guidance on accessing local resources. Grace shared her reliance on professional networks, saying, "At the health facility, I relied on my colleagues for educational information." Although these networks are not the primary source of support for most families, they can still play a valuable role in connecting families to specific resources and providing professional insights.

Conclusion

The data presented in this section addresses the importance of linking social capital for navigating educational resources. Key players such as family members, school-based professionals, and social networks contribute to resource navigation by building trust-based connections. However, systemic barriers within formal systems often push families to rely more heavily on informal networks, highlighting the adaptability and resilience of Navy families. These insights will be further explored in Chapter five, with a focus on how linking social capital operates alongside systemic challenges to influence resource accessibility.

Research Question 1c: How Are Resources Negotiated by Navy Families?

Navigating educational and support resources requires military families to leverage linking social capital, primarily trust-based relationships with institutions like schools and military services, to advocate for their needs effectively. Both officer and enlisted personnel use

linking social capital to access resources with officers reporting slightly higher reliance (51.7%) than enlisted personnel (40%). Structural barriers, especially bureaucratic complexities, present notable challenges in accessing these resources, making trust and personal networks essential in navigating institutional hurdles.

Navigating Educational and Support Resources. Trust in educators is a cornerstone of effective resource negotiation for military families. Participants emphasized this trust is often rooted in cultural competence and effective communication, which helps educators understand and address the unique challenges faced by military children. Rose described how on-base teachers excelled in this area, stating, “The teachers on base are very aware of all the things the kids are going through. They are able to understand and provide really good care.” Similarly, Cameron underscored the importance of communication, sharing, “The communication with the teacher was awesome, they really understood us, and I trusted she had our kids’ back because she understood the Navy community so well and its challenges.” These examples demonstrate how educators act as allies, providing both academic and emotional support during periods of transition.

In addition to educators, informal networks of Navy spouses play a critical role in resource negotiation. Miriam reflected on the value of peer connections, stating, “I do trust Navy spouses... Tribal knowledge is a necessary part of any move.” This shared knowledge enables families to adapt quickly to new environments. Violet echoed this sentiment, emphasizing, “We are all living the same kind of life, so it is easy to trust other spouses.” These examples demonstrate how informal networks complement formal systems by providing practical guidance and emotional reassurance.

Trust Among Navy Spouses for Resource Sharing. Beyond institutional actors, Navy spouses rely heavily on informal networks of peers to navigate resource options. Trust within the spouse community, grounded in shared experiences and mutual understanding, forms a vital support system. Miriam highlighted the importance of these connections: “I do trust Navy spouses, I think we rely on each other very heavily. Tribal knowledge is a necessary part of any move.” This collective knowledge allows families to adapt quickly to new environments and systems, particularly during relocations. Similarly, Violet reflected on the mutual reliance among spouses, stating, “We are all living the same kind of life, so it is easy to trust other spouses.” These examples illustrate how informal networks complement formal systems by offering practical advice and emotional reassurance, filling gaps that institutions often cannot address.

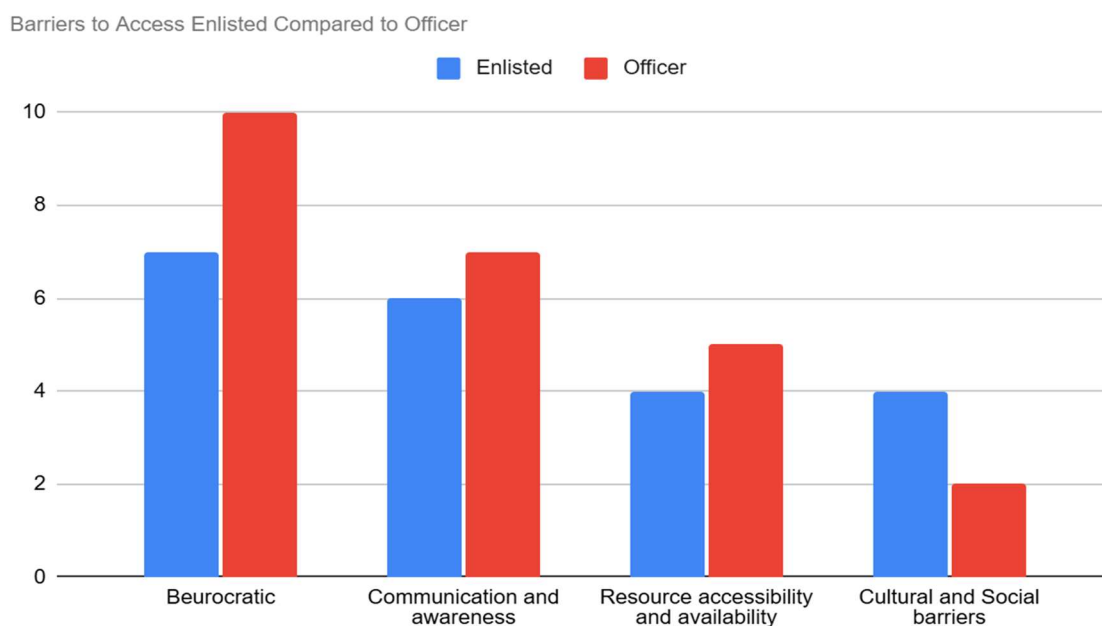
Selective Trust as a Negotiation Strategy. Selective trust emerged as a critical strategy for resource negotiation. Participants frequently described their reliance on trusted peers and informal networks when navigating institutional challenges. Miriam articulated her frustration with formal military resources: “When I tried to use military resources, I would get pointed in weird directions which would lead me to rabbit holes. I would end up just getting frustrated, so now I don’t use military resources at all. If I need anything, I turn to Facebook.” This sentiment was echoed by Eloise, who noted, “They’re hard to navigate [military resources], it’s a rabbit hole after rabbit hole. I don’t even try to use them anymore.”

These accounts highlight a significant issue: the inefficiencies within formal systems erode trust in institutional resources, driving families toward informal networks as their primary means of resource navigation. This reliance on selective trust allows families to confidently filter and manage information from both formal and informal sources.

Rank-Specific Challenges. The extent to which these systemic barriers affect families varies by rank. Officers reported slightly higher instances of bureaucratic barriers (10 compared to 7), likely reflecting their greater reliance on formal systems. Enlisted families, on the other hand, faced higher incidences of cultural and social barriers (4 compared to 2 officer families). These findings suggest rank influences not only the types of challenges families face but also the strategies they employ to overcome them. Communication gaps and accessibility issues were cited nearly equally across both groups, with 7 officer families and 6 enlisted families highlighting difficulties in obtaining accurate information. Figure 9 demonstrates these disparities, illustrating how rank shapes the negotiation of resources and access to institutional systems. Officers may encounter more structural hurdles due to their engagement with higher-level systems, while enlisted families often face social barriers that impede their ability to fully utilize available resources.

Figure 9

A Comparison of Barriers for Officer and Enlisted Spouses



Conclusion

Theme 1b addresses the pivotal role of trust in linking social capital as Navy families navigate institutional systems to access educational resources. For Question 1b, the findings reveal that school-based professionals, military-specific resources, and social and community networks are key players in facilitating resource access. Trust-based relationships with educators, counselors, and military liaisons further enable families to advocate for their children's needs effectively, and informal networks complement formal systems by providing practical guidance and emotional support. These networks serve as essential bridges, ensuring families can overcome bureaucratic challenges and establish stability in new locations.

For Question 1c, the data demonstrates how trust and selective validation underpin the negotiation of resources by Navy families. Trust in educators, grounded in cultural competence and effective communication, emerges as a cornerstone for accessing academic support. Simultaneously, trust among military spouses fosters shared resource navigation, enabling families to interpret and access resources more effectively. However, structural barriers within formal systems often push families toward informal networks, highlighting the need for families to be flexible in leveraging both linking and bonding capital to meet their needs.

Theme 2: Disconnect Between Provided and Accessed Resources Reflects Systemic Gaps

This theme explores the disconnect between the wide range of formal resources theoretically available to Navy families in San Diego and the smaller subset of resources they actively use. The data reveals significant challenges in accessing formal resources, despite their documented availability. These challenges often stem from systemic barriers such as inconsistent communication, logistical hurdles, and lack of awareness, which push families to rely on informal networks for support.

Research Question 2: What specific educational resources are accessible to Navy spouses in San Diego through formal and informal networks?

Of the 40 formal resources identified during focus groups, only six were regularly mentioned in interviews, representing just 15% of the total. Participants emphasized the importance of resources like Fleet and Family Support Services, military liaisons, and EFMP. For example, Elliot described Fleet and Family as “essential,” and Grace noted its consistent role in helping her family navigate challenges. Similarly, Tutor.com was highly valued, with Amelia describing it as “a lifesaver during deployments” and Grace echoing its importance for consistent academic support. Civilian resources like school counselors were the most frequently mentioned non-Navy formal resources, further emphasizing the role of civilian systems.

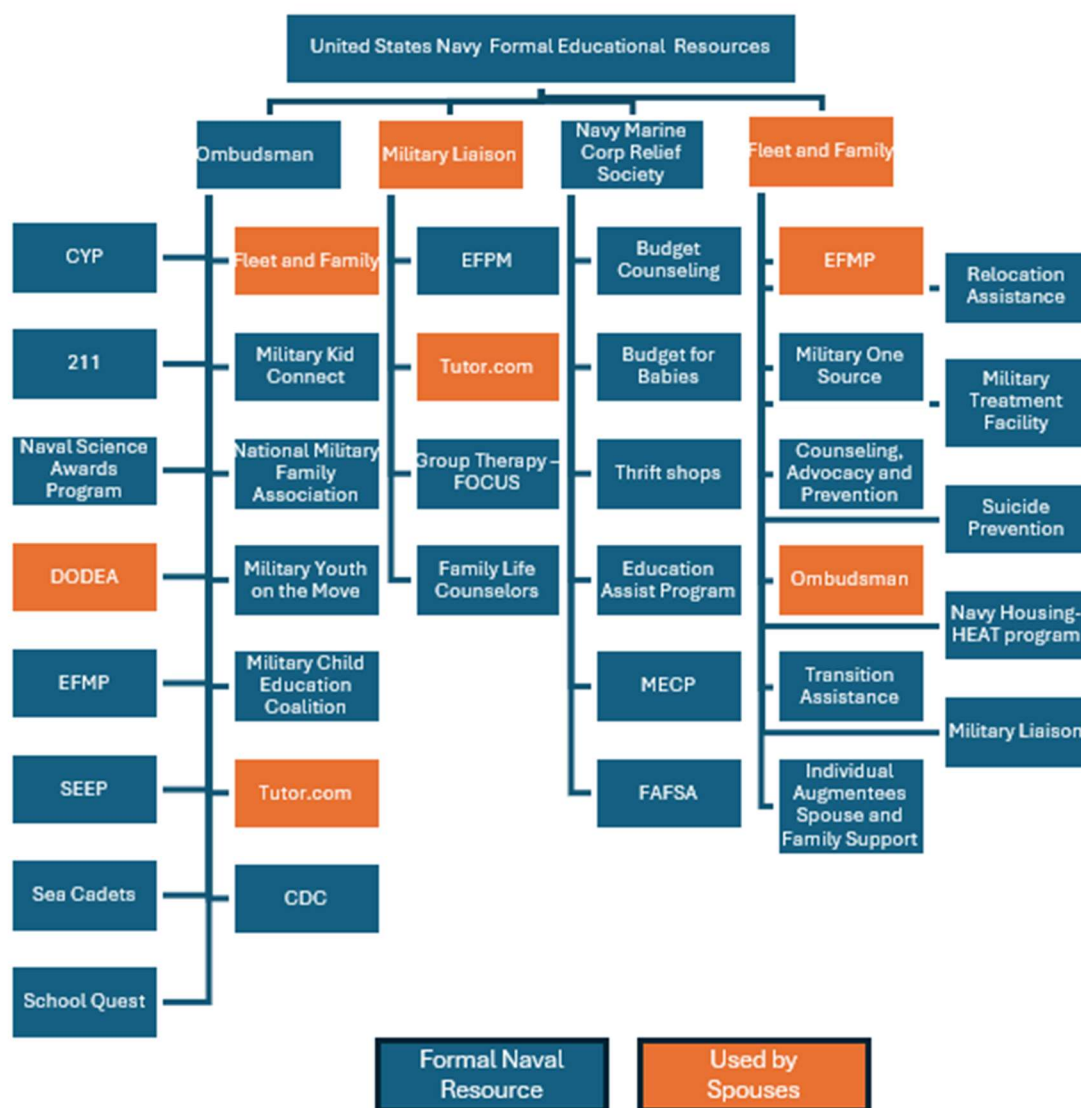
Focus groups also identified several formal resources that are theoretically available to Navy families but are rarely accessed, revealing a significant awareness gap. These include Ombudsman services, NMCRS, Military One Source, FOCUS group therapy, and Family Life Counselors. Despite their potential value, these resources were seldom mentioned during interviews. Keres expressed surprise, saying, “How come we are only just learning about these resources?” This observation is particularly striking given that all participants had at least 6 years of experience as Navy spouses, and more than half had over a decade. The underuse of these resources highlights systemic gaps in communication and outreach, leaving many families unaware of or unable to access valuable support.

Figure 10 shows the formal military resources that interviewees reported using. These resources were also mentioned during focus groups, suggesting alignment between what participants in both settings identified as important and accessible. Fleet and Family Support

Services, military liaisons, EFMP, and Tutor.com were frequently cited, highlighting their perceived utility and accessibility among Navy families.

Figure 10

Summary of Formal Resources Offered and Accessed by Military Spouses



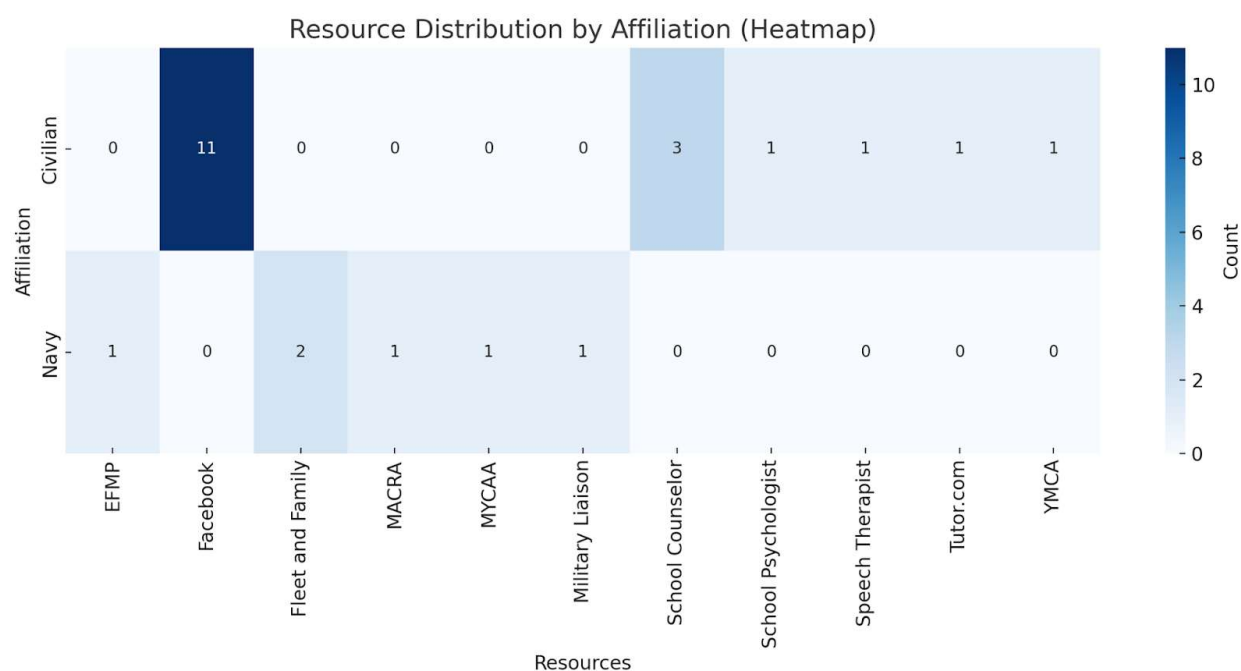
In contrast, informal networks emerged as critical access points for resources, particularly in areas where formal options were underused or insufficient. Platforms such as Facebook

groups, personal connections, and community advice accounted for more than half of the resources Navy spouses relied on. Amelia shared, “Facebook groups for the area . . . that is the easiest way for me to get information.” Grace echoed this sentiment, explaining, “Sometimes it’s faster to just ask another spouse than to try and figure out the formal system.” These findings illustrate how informal networks provide quick and practical guidance, bridging the gaps left by underused formal resources and ensuring families receive the support they need.

Figures summarizing formal and informal resource use (see Figure 10) and the comparison of Navy and civilian affiliations (see Figure 11) highlight the dominance of informal networks. By offering adaptable and community-driven solutions, informal networks address systemic barriers and support families navigating military life. Moreover, these networks demonstrate responsiveness to immediate challenges, making them indispensable for resource navigation.

Figure 11

Access and Use of Naval and Civilian Resources by Navy Families



Conclusion

The data reveals a significant disconnect between the educational resources that are theoretically available to Navy families and what they are actually able to access. Although a wide range of formal resources is offered, systemic barriers - including unclear communication and inconsistent outreach, often hinder their use. This pushes families to rely on informal networks, which provide timely and practical solutions. These networks such as Facebook groups and personal connections are not merely fallback strategies, but deliberate choices shaped by systemic inefficiencies. Families demonstrate selective trust in these networks, carefully filtering information to identify credible sources. These dynamic highlights both the importance of linking social capital in navigating formal systems and the role of informal networks in compensating for institutional shortcomings.

Research Question 2.a: Which Resources Are Absent and What Are the Reasons Behind Their Absence?

Although most academic resources are theoretically available to Navy families, participants reported a significant disconnect between what is offered and what is accessible. Challenges such as unclear information, inconsistent communication, and limited guidance hinder families' ability to locate and use these resources effectively. These systemic barriers create reliance on informal networks to navigate gaps in formal support systems.

Awareness and Accessibility Challenges. Participants highlighted a pervasive lack of awareness about available services, even those considered essential. Keres, for instance, expressed frustration, asking, "How come we are only just learning about these resources?" Similarly, Elliot, a joint senior enlisted member, shared, "I didn't even know my son qualified for EFMP or that I should have registered him." These statements reflect broader trends in the

data, where unclear communication and insufficient outreach prevent families from accessing programs explicitly designed for military families.

Gaps in consistency of information exacerbate these challenges. Eloise questioned the reliability of formal communication channels, noting, “Do all Ombudsmen have the same information? I am only now hearing about this, and this is our fourth command in the Navy.” This inconsistency leaves families without the guidance they need, creating additional barriers to resource access. As families face these systemic challenges, informal networks have emerged as critical tools for navigating gaps in formal support.

Insights from Online Military Spouse Communities. These frustrations are echoed in online Navy spouse communities, where spouses frequently share confusion and seek advice on navigating military resources. Posts from popular Facebook groups, such as Navy Spouses San Diego, reveal ongoing challenges with accessing EFMP, Fleet and Family, Child Development Center (CDC), and Military Liaisons. For example, Baylee Niehaus shared, “My husband has been in the Navy for over 1 year now, and I still have no idea how anything works. . . . I have almost no information on anything about military life. I don’t even know how to use Tricare.” Similarly, Kelly Morris described her struggles, saying, “I’m so new to this military life and so lost. I feel so overwhelmed. What should I look for when choosing?”

Logistical barriers were also common, with participants like Martha McGee highlighting inconvenient scheduling, stating, “Does anyone else find the time Fleet and Family classes very inconvenient? Why can’t they have any at night?” Despite these challenges, some spouses in online groups attempt to bridge the gaps by sharing advice and resources. Laura Lieber encouraged others to learn about recent EFMP reforms, posting, “Are you all familiar with the reforms to the EFMP program? Go check out: <https://thepromiseact.org/>. There’s also a FB

group for anyone in Special Ed and in EFMP.” Similarly, Cassie Lewis directed another spouse to seek help from a military liaison, stating, “Maybe try the military liaison through the school district. We are lucky that our kids’ school had one onsite, but not all of them do.” These discussions highlight the importance of online communities in helping Navy families navigate systemic gaps.

Relying on Informal Networks for Support and Advice. In the absence of accessible formal resources, Navy spouses often turn to informal networks for guidance and support. Elliot emphasized the value of these networks, advising, “Lean heavy on your community. There’s Facebook pages all over the place... rely on fellow parents that are going through the same thing that you’re going through.” Keres echoed this sentiment, suggesting, “Always reach out to friends that have lived in the place where you are moving.” Kenzie further highlights the importance of self-advocacy, stating, “Utilize those spouses, spouse groups . . . advocate for your child. Because, you know, their future is reliant on you advocating for them, because no one else will, not the Navy, no one.” Beyond addressing immediate challenges, these informal networks foster a sense of resilience and community among Navy families. They not only provide practical solutions but also serve as dynamic, community-driven responses to the systemic gaps in formal resources.

Conclusion

Theme 2 highlights the disconnect between the resources theoretically available to Navy families and those they can access. For Question 1, findings show that although a variety of formal resources exist, only a small fraction is actively used, with informal networks playing a critical role in filling gaps. Participants consistently cited platforms like Facebook groups and

personal connections as indispensable for navigating systemic challenges in accessing formal resources.

For Question 2, the data address systemic barriers such as unclear communication, inconsistent outreach, and logistical challenges which significantly hinder families' ability to use formal resources effectively. These challenges leave many families unaware of critical programs or struggling with how to access them. Informal networks, particularly online communities, emerge as essential tools for overcoming these barriers by providing timely advice, emotional support, and practical solutions. These networks enable families to navigate the complexities of military life when formal systems fall short. Furthermore, by prioritizing informal networks to bridge resource gaps, Navy families illustrate the power of linking social capital in creating actionable solutions amidst institutional shortcomings.

Theme 3: Rank and Socioeconomic Status as Hidden Determinants of Equity

This theme explores how rank (officer vs. enlisted), financial flexibility, spousal employment, and maturity affect access to educational resources for Navy-affiliated students in San Diego, revealing inequities that disproportionately affect enlisted families. These inequities highlight the interplay between systemic challenges and the lived experiences of military families, emphasizing the role of rank and socioeconomic status in shaping educational opportunities.

Research Question 3: How do Equity Considerations Unfold in the Access to Resources Among Navy-Affiliated Students in San Diego, Considering Factors Such as Rank (Officer or Enlisted)?

The data indicate that rank and socioeconomic status significantly impact families' ability to access and utilize educational resources. Officer families, with more financial flexibility, often

find it easier to engage in additional educational options, including private schooling and specialized services. In contrast, many enlisted families face financial constraints that limit these options, especially when managing costs associated with homeownership or the rising expense of living near San Diego bases. Additionally, maturity and time in service also impact access with more experienced families typically better positioned to navigate complex systems and advocate for their needs.

Rank and Socioeconomic Status. Rank significantly influences the financial flexibility families have to access additional educational resources, such as private schooling and external therapies. Officer families, with more disposable income, are often better positioned to make such investments. For instance, Miriam (O4), Keres (O5), and Charlotte (O3) chose to stay at home, allowing them more time to engage in school-related activities and navigate resources. As Keres (O5) explained, “I use Facebook groups for everything, from medical to school-related resources. It’s been really helpful for navigating.”

In contrast, enlisted families often face financial constraints that limit their choices. Rose (E6) shared how buying a home forced her to withdraw her children from private school: “There was just no way we could have continued paying for private education. We bought a house at the same time, so reluctantly we took the kids out of the private school.” Financial pressures extended to other areas as well. Rose explained how an increase in her husband’s rank led to the loss of WIC benefits despite having an additional child: “Living in San Diego is crazy. When we were first class, we qualified for WIC, but as soon as he became chief we no longer did, even though we had one more child.”

Maturity and Time in Service. Experience and time in military service also play a role in navigating resources. More experienced families are often better equipped to manage complex

systems and advocate for their needs. Eloise (E9) reflected on her journey, saying, “I was really young when we started, and we didn’t really know what we were doing. As we got older, we just figured it out.” This progression suggests that familiarity with military systems over time can help mitigate some of the initial barriers faced by newer families.

Spousal Employment. Spousal employment status significantly influences a family’s ability to manage educational resources and engage in school-related activities. Officer families in this study were more likely to have a nonworking spouse, providing greater flexibility to navigate educational systems and participate in school-related activities. Keres (O5), an officer spouse with a doctorate, shared, “I could work . . . but we don’t really need the money. I’d rather stay home and have more flexibility to take care of the kids and stuff.”

For enlisted families, financial constraints often meant that not working came with significant trade-offs. Rose (E6) shared how her decision to pause employment, encouraged by her husband, came with consequences: “I would work, but my husband was like, you know, just take a break and be with the children.” Although this decision allowed her to focus on childcare, it ultimately impacted on their ability to sustain private schooling for their children. She explained, “There was just no way we could have continued paying for private education. We bought a house at the same time, so reluctantly we took the kids out of the private school.”

Unlike officer spouses, who often had the financial flexibility to make employment decisions without compromising educational opportunities, enlisted families faced more constrained choices. These differences underscore how financial circumstances tied to rank influence a family’s ability to fully engage in and support their children’s education.

Geographical Location and Housing Costs. Housing affordability and location significantly shape access to educational resources. Enlisted families often live farther from base

due to the high cost of housing near San Diego’s military installations, creating logistical challenges. Rose (E6) shared, “We live an hour away from base because that’s what we could afford, but it makes everything harder—school, appointments, everything.” Similarly, Grace (E7) noted, “We had to choose between better housing further away or closer but much more expensive, so we chose the cheaper option.”

By contrast, officer families were more likely to choose housing based on proximity to high-quality school districts, prioritizing access to better educational opportunities. Cameron (O5) explained, “I think the school districts were a large factor in determining what kind of area we wanted to live in. We heard the schools were pretty good in the Scripps Ranch and Poway area, and so that’s where we decided to buy.” Miriam (O4) and Kenzie (O3) also highlighted similar decisions, citing the quality of schools in Poway and the continuity of private education systems as key factors.

Table 7 summarizes BAH rates and base pay by rank, illustrating the financial differences between enlisted and officer families. With the average mortgage in San Diego close to \$5,000 and the average rent for a three-bedroom apartment around \$4,200 (Zumper, 2024), these figures demonstrate why lower enlisted families often need to live farther from base to afford housing. For example, an E5’s combined BAH and base pay is \$7,229, which barely covers the average rental costs in San Diego, leaving little room for other expenses. Conversely, an O5’s combined total of \$13,657 provides significantly more flexibility for housing choices near high-quality schools.

Table 7
Summary of Base Allowance Housing and Base Pay by Rate

Rate	BAH with dependents	Base pay (over 6 years)	Total
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E5	\$3627	\$3602	\$7229
E6	\$4065	\$3905	\$7970
E7	\$4170	\$4465	\$8635
E8	\$4278	\$5215 (over 8 years)	\$9493
E9	\$4476	\$6370 (over 10 years)	\$10846
O1	\$3684	\$4815	\$8499
O2	\$4062	\$6101	\$10163
O3	\$4347	\$7133	\$11480
O4	\$4803	\$7682	\$12485
O5	\$5130	\$8527	\$13657
O6	\$5217	\$9481	\$14698

Note. Data taken from Veteran.com Team. (2024, January 26). *2024 California BAH (Basic Allowance for Housing) rates*. Veteran.com. <https://veteran.com/bah-rates-state/california/>

Conclusion

This section highlights the significant role of rank and financial flexibility in shaping access to educational resources for Navy families. Rank not only determines income levels but also influences decisions about housing, schooling, and resource allocation, creating distinct disparities between officers and enlisted families. Geographic location and housing affordability amplify these inequities, particularly for enlisted families forced to live farther from base. Together, these factors illustrate how socioeconomic status, and systemic structures intersect to shape educational outcomes, pointing to rank and financial flexibility as critical determinants of equity in resource access.

Theme 4: Educational Decisions Reflect Structural Barriers Rather Than Preferences

The educational choices made by military families are often driven by structural factors, such as housing affordability, school district quality, and family logistics, rather than personal

preferences. These decisions are shaped by the interplay of formal and informal support systems, rank, financial capacity, and the practical realities of frequent relocations. This theme highlights the key moments of decision making as families navigate structural constraints to create stable and supportive educational environments for their children. This theme addresses Question 1a.

Research Question 1a: What Were the Key Moments of Decision Making During this Process?

Key decision-making moments were categorized into four main areas: health, safety, and well-being considerations; family and resource-based decision making; educational support services decisions; and resource-driven educational decisions (see Figure 13). These categories illustrate how structural barriers, and available resources influence military families' choices. The breakdown of these categories by rank is shown in Figure 12, highlighting differences between officers and enlisted families. Officers were more likely to focus on educational support services and resource-driven decisions, and enlisted families emphasized family-based decisions and health and safety considerations.

Figure 12

Key Moments of Educational Decision Making for Navy Spouses

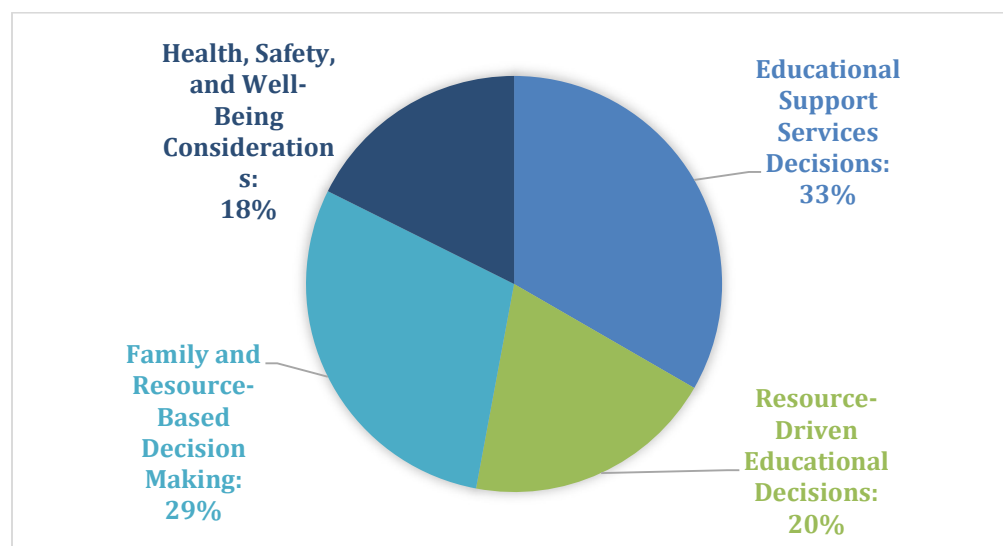
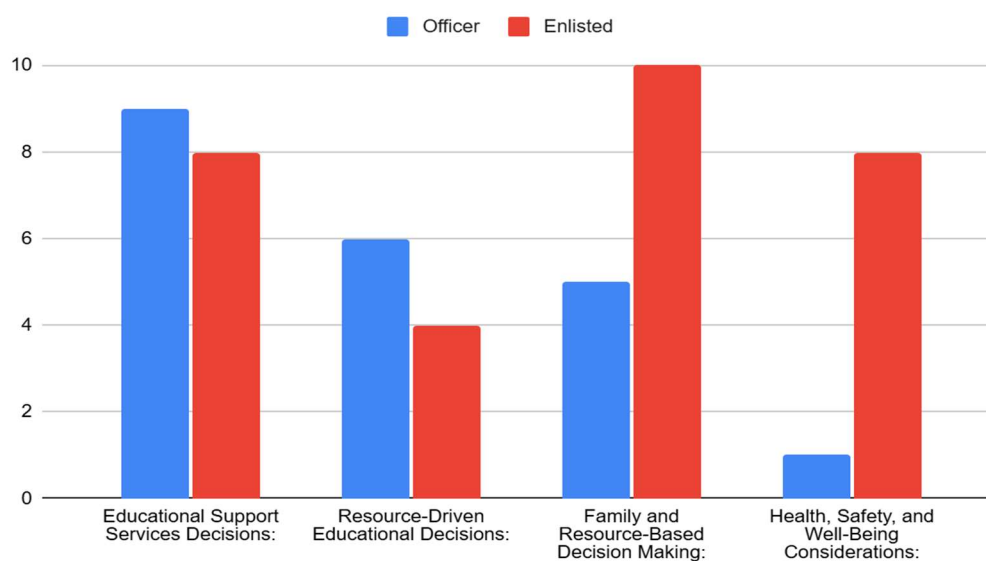


Figure 13*Key Moments of Decision Making for Officer and Enlisted Spouses*

Health, Safety, and Well-Being Considerations (17.6%). Health, safety, and work–life balance consistently emerged as key considerations for military families when making educational decisions. These factors often intertwined with the challenges of frequent relocations and deployments, creating additional stressors for families as they sought stability for their children. For example, Violet explained the importance of additional support during her husband’s absences, stating, “I brought my mom out to live with me because my husband was gone so much, and I needed help with the three kids.” Similarly, Rose described the toll constant moving takes on families, both physically and emotionally: “Between the high blood pressure and the hormones of the stress, you know, of moving constantly. I would work but my husband was like, you know, just take a break and be with the children.”

Another significant aspect of this category involved concerns about bullying and safety. Rose shared how addressing bullying influenced her educational decisions, stating, “My

daughter was being bullied at her previous school, so finding a safer environment for her was my top priority.” Violet added to this narrative, reflecting on her experiences with her children, “We had to intervene with the school because the bullying was affecting his confidence and well-being.”

To address these challenges, many military families turned to available resources for support during times of academic or emotional stress. One common resource was Fleet and Family, as Elliot described: “Aiden, my son, he’s had some challenging moments in school, and we believe it’s because both my husband and I are gone so much. So, reaching out to Fleet and Family for counseling resources was really easy and very comfortable to do.” However, not all families relied on formal military resources. Rose, for example, recounted her experience addressing bullying:

My son started getting bullied at school, and they did not handle it appropriately. At the end of the school year, my son actually got hit in the face. The school’s solution was for my son to walk separately from this kid. From there on out, every year I have to explain this situation to their new teacher to keep this kid away from my kid.

This contrast illustrates the diverse strategies families employ, whether leveraging formal support systems like Fleet and Family or relying on personal knowledge, advocacy, and self-reliant approaches to address their children’s needs.

Together, these examples demonstrate the complexity of challenges faced by military spouses to include health, safety, and emotional well-being. Whether through addressing bullying, seeking formal counseling, or drawing on personal expertise, military families adapt to complex challenges to ensure their children’s stability and educational success. This adaptability

of military spouses speaks to the resilience required to navigate the intersection of military life and educational needs.

Family and Resource-Based Decision Making (29.4%). For many military families, leveraging personal and community support systems was a critical factor in navigating the challenges of frequent relocations and ensuring their children's educational success. These decisions often relied on the strength of close-knit relationships, both in the family and in their broader communities, to overcome logistical and resource-based obstacles. For example, extended family members frequently played a vital role in providing stability during times of transition or deployment. Violet shared, "I brought my mom out to live with me because my husband was gone so much, and I needed help with the three kids." Similarly, Cameron emphasized the importance of having additional family support, stating, "Yeah, we had our parents move out with us to help because my wife and I are both active." Rose highlighted this further, explaining, "The kids and I stayed with my parents even though my husband got orders to Tennessee, it was just easier for them to stay in the same school than move." These examples indicate how families strategically combined formal and informal networks to meet their children's educational and emotional needs. This blending of resources highlights the adaptability required to navigate military life, particularly for enlisted families, who often relied more heavily on these informal systems due to limited access to formal support or financial constraints.

Military families also relied on community connections to address gaps in formal resources and find solutions tailored to their unique circumstances. Kenzie described turning to Fleet and Family Services when her son faced challenges in school: "We ended up using Fleet and Family for counseling resources when my son started having difficulties." Meanwhile,

Charlotte highlighted her preference for nonmilitary resources, explaining, “I didn’t rely on any military sources. I used my own systems to get things going early on.” Additionally, Eloise shared how informal networks like social media were crucial for gathering information: “And you know when I want to know something, I just go online or to social media and search for it.” These accounts underscore how families strategically combined formal and informal networks to meet their children’s educational and emotional needs.

Religious or value-based decisions further exemplify how families drew on community support to create continuity for their children. Miriam shared her focus on stability, noting, “We are looking at a Private Catholic School in Poway because they currently attend one, and I think the continuity in education will be there if we keep them in the same system.” These decisions reflect how families often prioritized educational environments that aligned with their values and provided a sense of predictability during periods of upheaval.

The ability to seek and use resources independently was another strategy of family driven decision making. Charlotte’s educational background gave her the confidence to bypass formal military systems: “Yeah, I had no military resources, mostly just because of my educational background, which gives me prior knowledge of all the educational resources out there.” Similarly, some families turned to online tools and social media to gather information, as one participant noted, “If we have an idea of where we are going, about 6 months out, I start getting online looking at Facebook groups, looking at state laws and even school districts.” This proactive approach highlights how families leveraged self-reliant strategies to ensure their children’s success.

These examples demonstrate the centrality of family and community networks in driving educational decisions for military families. Whether through extended family support, leveraging

community resources, or adopting self-reliant strategies, these decisions reflect the adaptability and resourcefulness of military families as they navigate the complexities associated with military life. By building strong networks and using available resources, families were able to create supportive and stable environments for their children despite the challenges of military life.

Educational Support Services Decision (33.3%). Maintaining educational continuity and advocating for special accommodations emerged as pivotal moments in the decision-making process for military families, highlighting the challenges they face in navigating complex educational systems. Eloise emphasized the importance of preparing for future relocations by implementing a 504 plan, stating, “I put a 504 in place at St. Michael’s only because I wanted that piece of paper to take with me that said he gets these mild accommodations.” This forward-thinking approach underscores the critical need for portable documentation to ensure consistency in support across different school systems.

Kenzie shared a more adversarial experience in her advocacy efforts, explaining, “I had to put my foot on their necks (Chula Vista School District) and make them retest her . . . their testing finally showed dyslexia.” Her story reflects the persistence required to secure appropriate accommodation in a system that often places the burden of advocacy on parents. Moreover, frequent relocations force military families to repeatedly navigate unfamiliar educational systems, adding layers of frustration to an already complex process.

For some families, planning for future moves also influenced their decisions. Keres described her proactive approach, stating, “So like we are moving to Tennessee next, and I’m looking into their curriculum and trying to line it up with their current school, looking for gaps that I can address now.” Her experience illustrates the level of foresight and effort military

families must exert to ensure smooth educational transitions for their children. In other cases, the unique needs of children with disabilities drove decisions about educational services. Amelia explained her choice to homeschool, sharing, “My oldest is dyslexic with ADHD. My other daughter is autistic with ADHD, and my third daughter has ADHD. I just felt like, you know, maybe I can customize their education a bit more than the school system.” This decision highlights the creative and individualized strategies some families adopt to address gaps in traditional schooling.

Resource-Driven Educational Decisions (19.6%). Resource-driven educational decisions often reflect the socioeconomic disparities between officers and enlisted families, with officers having greater flexibility to prioritize school quality in their decision-making processes. The data revealed resource-driven decisions were made predominantly by officers, as 5 out of 6 officers prioritized selecting the location of their child’s school first and then choosing housing accordingly. In contrast, only 2 out of 6 enlisted families reported making school-first decisions, citing financial limitations as a primary factor in their housing choices.

Families weighed factors such as school quality, convenience, and financial feasibility when determining where their children would attend school. For instance, Stella explained, “We basically chose based on school, because I went to a really good elementary and high school, and my husband used to be a teacher before, so because of that, it was super important to us to be in a good school district.” Similarly, Cameron highlighted the significance of school districts in their decision making, stating, “I think the school districts were a large factor in determining what kind of area we wanted to live in. We heard the schools were pretty good in the Scripps Ranch and Poway area.”

Kenzie emphasized the benefits of selecting a school district with better resources, sharing, “I chose Poway Unified District because of the resources they provide and the class sizes.” She added, “I would be remiss if I did not take advantage of the system being the way it is when I made the decision to move up here to Poway.” Officers, like Kenzie and Cameron, often had the financial privilege to focus on schools with strong reputations and ample resources before settling on housing.

Enlisted families, however, were more likely to report that financial constraints influenced their decisions. Rose reflected on her process for evaluating schools, noting, “I will also hop on to Niche.com to see where the smaller class sizes are,” demonstrating her reliance on careful research to maximize opportunities within budget limitations. Grace shared her experience of housing decisions driven by financial considerations, explaining, “We ended up buying a house about 30 minutes north because we could not afford anything in San Diego, and then finding a school near our house to send them to.”

Concluding Thoughts to Theme four

This section highlights how structural barriers, including housing affordability, school district quality, and systemic resistance, shape the educational decisions of military families. These decisions are less reflective of personal preferences and more indicative of the constraints imposed by systemic inefficiencies. Self-advocacy and reliance on family and community support networks emerge as crucial strategies for navigating these barriers. Together, the data demonstrates how Navy families adapt to these challenges, often blending formal and informal resources to bridge gaps and ensure stability for their children’s education. These insights reinforce the inference that educational decisions for military families are fundamentally shaped by systemic barriers rather than individual preferences.

Conclusion

In summary, Chapter four explored the emergent themes derived from the data analysis, providing a detailed understanding of how Navy families in San Diego navigate educational resources. The themes of selective trust, systemic gaps, socioeconomic disparities, and structural barriers highlight the complex dynamics these families face. These findings reveal the adaptive strategies used by military families to blend formal and informal networks, highlighting both resilience and inequities. Chapter five will build on these findings to answer the study's research questions, examining their broader implications for social capital theory and the experiences of other transient populations.

CHAPTER FIVE

INFERENCES, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter builds on the data analysis presented in Chapter four by using the identified themes and key findings. It aims to answer research questions and derive key inferences about how Navy spouses navigate educational resources for their children. Rather than synthesizing themes, this chapter delves deeper into the inferences of the data, examining how selective trust, institutional navigation, resource gaps, and socioeconomic status influence access to educational support. Additionally, the chapter situates these findings within the broader context of highly mobile populations, exploring both similarities and distinctions. It highlights how the unique experiences of Navy families contribute to and expand the existing literature on mobility, resource accessibility, and social capital. For example, while highly mobile civilian populations may similarly rely on informal networks and face systemic resource gaps, the military context introduces specific challenges, such as navigating frequent relocations, advocating for special educational services, and managing inequities tied to rank and financial capacity. By examining these nuances, this chapter not only enhances our understanding of military families but also offers valuable insights into the broader dynamics of mobility and equity across different contexts. These findings and inferences contribute to a deeper understanding of the interplay between social capital, mobility, and resource accessibility, offering a foundation for future research and policy recommendations aimed at supporting highly mobile populations. A summary of the themes and findings can be found in Table 8.

Table 8*Summary of Themes and Inferences*

Theme	Inferences
Theme 1a: Selective Trust-Based Bonding Social Capital as a Survival Strategy Theme 2: Disconnect between provided and accessed resources reflects systemic gaps	Selective trust is foundational to resource navigation for highly mobile families, enabling them to manage information overload and identify credible sources within networks
Theme 1b: Trust in Linking Social Capital for Institutional Navigation Theme 2: Disconnect Between Provided and Accessed Resources	Linking social capital is an important asset for Navy families. However, systemic barriers, like unclear communication, push families to rely on informal networks for solutions.
Theme 3: Rank and socioeconomic status as hidden determinants of equity	Rank and financial flexibility exacerbate educational inequalities, shaping access to housing and resources, especially in high-cost areas like San Diego.
Theme 4: Educational decisions reflect structural barriers rather than preferences	Educational decisions are shaped more by systemic barriers than individual preferences, requiring self-advocacy and family support systems to bridge gaps and ensure stability.

Answering the Research Questions

To address the research questions, this chapter is organized by themes to reflect the nuanced ways Navy Families navigate educational resources through formal and informal networks. Organizing by theme allows for a more integrated exploration of the complex interactions Navy families navigate and align with the thematic structure presented in chapter

four. By focusing on themes, this section will offer insights into resource navigation with implications for other highly mobile populations.

Theme 1a and 1b: Selective Trust-Based Bonding Social Capital as a Critical Survival Strategy and Theme and Trust in Linking Social Capital for Institutional Navigation

This combined theme highlights selective trust as the foundational element that enables military spouses to navigate both formal and informal educational resources effectively following relocation. Bonding social capital, formed through close-knit relationships within family units and among military spouses, provides emotional and practical support, helping families adapt to frequent moves and bridge systemic gaps. Simultaneously, linking social capital-relationships with school-based professionals, military liaisons, and other formal systems proves essential for accessing formal educational resources and addressing structural barriers. The interaction between these two forms of social capital illustrates how Navy spouses strategically blend informal networks for guidance and formal networks for institutional navigation, particularly when systemic inefficiencies make accessing resources challenging. This theme addresses the following research questions:

Q1. How do parents establish and utilize both formal and informal networks to navigate and access resources for promoting their children's academic success following relocation?

Q1b. Who are the key players in these negotiations?

Q1c. How are the resources negotiated?

Q1d. How do Navy spouses contribute to social capital within the military community?

Establishing and Utilizing Formal and Informal Networks

Navy spouses employ a dual approach of informal and formal networks to navigate and access educational resources for their children after relocation. Through interviews, focus groups

and digital analysis, social media platforms like Facebook emerged as a central tool for informal network building, with participants frequently emphasizing its convenience and reliability. For instance, Miriam shared during her interview, “I just look on Facebook for anything that I need—what schools there are, where’s the best place to go.” Furthermore, Amelia’s proactive research, described as starting six months prior to relocation, highlights how social media enables families to plan and gather localized information. Focus groups supported this finding to some extent with two spouses confirming using Facebook to connect to formal Naval resources.

However, the interviews also revealed disparities in access to informal support systems. For example, Grace noted, “I don’t have anyone but my husband and son...when I look at my phone, I have no one to call.” This highlighted that while informal networks often serve as a lifeline for many Navy spouses, others encounter limitations due to smaller or less accessible support systems. These differences highlight the variability of informal networks across the community.

In-person connections within local Navy communities also featured prominently in the data, emphasizing the importance of bonding social capital. Shared experiences, such as frequent relocations, foster camaraderie and trust among Navy spouses, as Violet described during her interview: “We are all living the same kind of life, so it is easy to trust other spouses.” Miriam similarly highlighted the significance of informal knowledge sharing, referring to it as “tribal knowledge.” These insights were supported by focus group discussions, where participants reiterated how close-knit Navy communities facilitate resource sharing and emotional support.

Formal networks, although accessed secondary to informal networks, were shown to play a complementary role in navigating educational systems. Through interviews, trust in educators and school-based professionals emerged as a key enabler of linking capital. Cameron notes,

The communication with the teacher was awesome...I trusted that she had our kids' back because she understood the Navy community so well and its challenges." Similar sentiments were described by Charlotte, who described how a school psychologist guided her in securing special education services for her child.

Although formal networks were accessed less frequently as informal, the data demonstrated how informal networks often serve as bridges to formal resources. For instance, Elliot emphasized the role of informal networks in guiding families to trusted formal systems "lean heavily on your community...rely on fellow parents that are going through the same thing you're going through." This reality was reinforced by Violet's comment: "if another mom friend came to me and was like, 'I know this great thing,' then I would go look into it." Such narratives from interviews illustrate how selective trust within formal networks directs families to credible formal resources, enabling them to overcome bureaucratic barriers. For example, Elliot recounted how a school district liaison helped get immediate services for her child who had an IEP. These findings were validated by Navy Facebook groups where trust-based recommendations held significant worth as in the case of Kelly Morris who described her struggles, saying, "I'm so new to this military life and so lost. I feel so overwhelmed. What should I look for when choosing?" These findings highlight the pivotal role of trust and selective peer validation in navigating complex systems.

Key Players in Negotiations

Navy families navigate the complexities of relocation and educational resource access through a dynamic interplay between linking and bonding social capital, leveraging both formal and informal networks to meet their needs. The most significant key players were family and self, constituting 40% of responses. Spouses, parents, and extended family members often take

on the primary responsibility for advocating for their children's needs, particularly during relocations and transitions. This role includes self-advocacy and leveraging close-knit familial networks to overcome systemic barriers. Keres succinctly described her proactive approach: "I had to help myself resolve the challenge." Similarly, Charlotte highlighted her reliance on personal connections and expertise: "I don't really interact with them [military resources]. I relied on what I got. I got him into the school district myself. I used my systems to actually get things going early on and used the people from the Department of Ed who I already knew." These examples underscore how Navy spouses frequently act as self-advocates, navigating complex systems with minimal reliance on external support.

In addition to self-advocacy, some families relied on their immediate family networks, which provided essential emotional and logistical support. As Violet mentioned, "I brought my mom out to live with me because my husband was gone so much, and I needed help with the three kids." Violet was one of four participants who reported having live-in relatives to assist with childcare and educational responsibilities, highlighting the critical role of extended family in ensuring stability during transitions.

School-based professionals emerged as pivotal players, comprising 28.6% of responses. Teachers, guidance counselors, school psychologists, and administrators addressed both academic and emotional challenges faced by military children. Cameron highlighted the critical role of educators, stating, "The communication with the teacher was awesome...I trusted she had our kids' backs." Similarly, Charlotte noted, "I started to talk to the school psychologist about where to start, and he pointed me in the right direction for getting resources for my son." These school-based professionals provided tailored support, bridging the gap between families and institutional systems, particularly when frequent relocations created additional barriers.

Social and community networks accounted for 17.1% of the responses, with informal networks like social media groups and local communities serving as vital sources of information and support. Platforms like Facebook were frequently cited for their convenience and breadth of localized information. Amelia described these platforms as indispensable: “Facebook groups for the area....that is the easiest way for me to get information.” Churches and neighbors also played a role, fostering a sense of belonging and community integration. Keres noted, “Our church is really great, and my kids met a lot of friends there, which helped them assimilate when we first moved.”

Military-specific resources, such as the FRGs and military liaisons, were cited by 11.4% of respondents. Although less frequently used than family or informal networks, these resources provided critical support for addressing deployment-related challenges and facilitating smooth transitions. Stella explained, “We tried the military liaison through the school district. We’re lucky our kids’ school had one onsite, but not all of them do.” FRGs were also valued for their logistical and emotional support, with Eloise describing them as a “very trustworthy source, as opposed to reading everyone’s comments on Facebook.”

Together, these findings reveal a complex ecosystem of key players supporting military families. Although family and self-reliance form the foundation of resource navigation, school-based professionals, social networks, and military-specific resources provide essential complementary support, enabling families to overcome systemic and logistical barriers. This interplay between key players underscores the importance of both bonding and linking social capital in military families’ strategies for resource access and educational stability

Resource Negotiation

Resources are primarily negotiated through trust-formed relationships and self-advocacy. Kenzie encapsulates this approach emphasizing, “Utilize those spouses, spouse groups... advocate for your child. Because, you know, their future is reliant on you advocating for them, because no one else will, not the Navy, no one.” This highlights the importance of self-advocacy in ensuring access to essential educational and support resources. Whether through formal or informal avenues, trust - built on shared experiences, mutual understanding, or cultural competency - emerges as a critical foundation for resource negotiation.

Although formal resources are used by Navy spouses, they are often accessed indirectly through linking capital facilitated by informal networks due to systemic barriers and inefficiencies. For example, Miriam described her frustration “When I tried to use military resources, I would get pointed in weird directions which would lead me to rabbit holes. I would end up just getting frustrated, so now I don’t use military resources at all. If I need anything, I turn to Facebook.” Similarly, Eloise explained, “They’re hard to navigate [military resources], it’s a rabbit hole after rabbit hole. I don’t even try to use them anymore.” These examples underscore the fragility of trust in formal systems and highlight how Navy spouses adapt by turning to informal networks where trust is more easily established and maintained.

Barriers to resource negotiation differ by rank. Officers report higher levels of bureaucratic barriers, likely reflecting their greater interaction with formal systems due to their spouses’ leadership roles. In contrast, Enlisted spouses face more cultural and social barriers potentially tied to fewer formalized peer groups and limited access to targeted resources. For instance, online data reveals a lack of specific enlisted spouse groups in San Diego compared to the several created for officers, indicating a disparity in social and community support structures.

These systemic challenges-ranging from unclear communication and inconsistent outreach to logistical hurdles-hinder access to formal resources, pushing families toward informal networks for guidance and solutions. This reliance on informal networks reflects both the adaptability of Navy families and the ongoing need to address inefficiencies within formal systems. However, this shift may exacerbate inequities, as not all families have equal access to robust informal networks, leaving some at a disadvantage in securing critical resources.

How do Navy Spouses Contribute to Social Capital within the Military Community?

Navy spouses contribute to social capital by forming trusting relationships that facilitate resource sharing, mutual support, and problem-solving. Bonding social capital, rooted in close-knit connections among spouses, provides emotional stability and practical guidance during relocations. Miriam emphasizes, “We as military spouses rely on each other very heavily. Tribal knowledge is a necessary part of any move,” addressing the reliance on shared experiences and mutual understanding. Similarly, Stella mentioned the collaborative nature of these networks: “With other military spouses, we do talk about moves...and relocating.”

However, not all spouses fully engage in these networks. Barriers such as trust issues or negative interactions can limit participation. Eloise noted, “I don’t interact ever. I just read the article or post. I don’t even hit like or comment.” Additionally, Grace described dismissive reactions that discouraged her from seeking help, saying, “People would say, ‘Oh, that’s not what happened to me,’ and it becomes a debate, so now I don’t even post responses.” These experiences reveal the fragility of trust within bonding networks and the challenges of maintaining inclusivity.

In addition to bonding networks, spouses engage in linking social capital by bridging informal and formal systems. Kenzie, who has overcome many obstacles advocating the special

educational needs of her daughter illustrated this role: “Sometimes I volunteer at the school and talk to parents, letting them know if there is anything they need or need help navigating.”

Similarly, Keres collaborated with school staff to address her children’s needs, saying, “I did speak to their guidance counselor to let him know their dad was on deployment.” These actions demonstrated how Navy spouses act as connectors, facilitating access to formal resources and navigating systemic barriers.

Although some spouses face challenges due to limited awareness or the transient nature of military life, their collective efforts build and sustain vital networks. These contributions reflect an adaptive strategy, leveraging trust and proactive engagement to navigate complex systems. However there remains a gap in our knowledge of how Navy families cultivate these networks over time, particularly across varying ranks and geographic locations.

Insights and Key Findings

Navy spouses use selective trust as a survival strategy for navigating a highly mobile lifestyle. Selective trust allows them to manage information overload and identify credible sources within networks. Informal networks, while vital for guidance, are not universally accessible amongst Navy spouses, creating disparities in resource navigation. Bonding social capital provides emotional stability and practical support, while linking social capital bridges families to formal systems. The data reveal that Navy spouses adeptly blend these forms of social capital to create a patchwork of solutions amidst systemic inefficiencies.

This theme highlights the fragility of trust in formal systems and the adaptability of Navy families in leveraging informal networks. However, reliance on informal systems raises questions about sustainability and equity, particularly for families with limited access to robust networks. Addressing these systemic gaps requires a more inclusive approach to resource

distribution and outreach as systematic challenges are not unique to Navy families.

Understanding the broader implications for highly mobile families and how they access resources, despite systemic barriers, is important in understanding the resilience strategies that transcend specific communities. Highly mobile families, such as immigrant families, refugee populations, or people experiencing homelessness, often face similar challenges in accessing reliable support systems. By examining the adaptability of Navy families and their reliance on selective trust, we can identify strategies to improve resource accessibility and equity for other transient populations.

Theme 2: Disconnect Between Provided and Accessed Resources

This theme examines the disparity between the educational and support resources theoretically available to Navy families in San Diego and the resources they are practically able to access. Despite the wide range of formal services offered, such as Fleet and Family Support Services, EFMP, and school liaisons, systematic barriers hinder effective use, pushing families toward informal networks for practical solutions. This gap reflects a failure in institutional outreach and design, which places additional burdens on families already navigating the complexities of military life. To provide a more cohesive and comprehensive analysis, this theme addresses the following questions together:

Question 2: What specific educational resources are accessible to Navy spouses in San Diego through formal and informal networks?

Question 2a: Which Resources Are Absent and What Are the Reasons Behind Their Absence?

These questions are combined because the natural progression of accessing what resources are available, is to explore the gaps in access and the systemic barriers causing those gaps.

Accessibility of Educational Resources to Navy Spouses in San Diego

The data reveals a significant disconnect between what resources are offered and what is accessible. Although focus groups identified over 40 formal resources, participants frequently mentioned only six. Fleet and Family Support Services, EFMP, and Tutor.com were described as indispensable, with spouses like Elliot calling Fleet and Family “essential” and Amelia describing Tutor.com as “a lifesaver during deployments.” However, less-utilized resources, such as Ombudsman services and Family Life Counselors, highlight critical gaps in communication and outreach. Keres’s comment for example “How come we are only just learning about these resources?” speaks to a systemic issue: the Navy’s inability to effectively inform families about available programs, even among experienced spouses.

Informal networks, by contrast, emerged as the backbone of resource navigation. These networks, particularly through platforms like Facebook, offer real-time, community-driven solutions. As Amelia explained, “Facebook groups for the area . . . that is the easiest way for me to get information.” Informal networks’ immediacy and adaptability fill the gaps left by formal systems, creating a grassroots response to systemic inefficiencies. Yet this reliance raises questions about equity and sustainability: do these networks consistently meet families’ needs, and how do they function under extreme pressures, such as deployments or relocations?

These dynamics point to the centrality of selective trust as a mechanism for managing information overload. Families validate resources through trusted peers or firsthand experiences, reducing the risk of misinformation and ensuring relevance. This practice not only highlights the

adaptability of military families but also reflects a deep mistrust in formal systems' ability to deliver timely and reliable support.

Understanding the Absence and Accessibility Challenges of Educational Resources

The data reveal those systemic barriers, including inconsistent communication, logistical hurdles, and inadequate outreach, significantly hinder families' access to resources. Participants shared pervasive frustrations with formal systems. Elliot noted, "I didn't even know my son qualified for EFMP or that I should have registered him," a reflection of unclear communication and missed opportunities. Similarly, Eloise observed, "Do all Ombudsmen have the same information? I am only now hearing about this, and this is our fourth command in the Navy," emphasizing the fragmented nature of resource dissemination.

These barriers are further highlighted in online Navy spouse communities, where confusion and frustration are frequently shared. Posts on platforms like Facebook illustrate ongoing challenges with accessing EFMP, Fleet and Family, and CDC programs. One participant described being "overwhelmed" and "lost," highlighting the emotional toll of navigating these systems. This points to a troubling reality: formal networks, intended to provide stability, often create additional stress and uncertainty for families.

Despite these shortcomings, informal networks have become a deliberate choice for families. By leveraging social media and peer networks, spouses bypass formal barriers to access practical, timely solutions. Grace noted, "Sometimes it's faster to just ask another spouse than to try and figure out the formal system." This adaptability reflects the resilience of military families but also raises concerns about the Navy's reliance on informal systems to compensate for institutional failures.

Insights and Key Findings

The disconnect between theoretically available and practically accessible resources underscores a need for systemic reform. Families' reliance on informal networks illustrates a deep trust in community-driven solutions, but this reliance is not without risks. Informal networks, while effective in the short term, may lack consistency and reliability over time. Furthermore, the Navy's failure to address systemic barriers perpetuates inequities, as access to informal networks often depends on rank, experience, and location.

This theme reveals a fundamental tension: formal systems are designed to support military families but fail to meet their needs in practice. As a result, families turn to linking social capital to bridge gaps, relying on both formal and informal networks to create a patchwork of support. These insights emphasize the importance of selective trust in navigating resources and highlight the systemic inefficiencies that force families to develop their own solutions.

Theme 3: Rank and Socioeconomic Status as Determinants of Equity

The inferences drawn from the data covered in this theme highlight how rank and financial flexibility shape educational opportunities and access to resources, revealing inequities that disproportionately affect enlisted families. These inequities are further magnified in high-cost areas like San Diego, where housing affordability, spousal employment status and logistical barriers create distinct challenges for Navy families. This theme addresses Research Question 3: How do equity considerations unfold in the access to resources among Navy-affiliated students in San Diego, considering factors such as rank (Officer or Enlisted)?

Impact of Rank and Financial Flexibility

Rank plays a significant role in determining a family's financial flexibility, shaping their ability to access alternative schooling, specialized services, and higher-quality public schools.

Officer families often have greater disposable income and higher allowances allowing them to prioritize housing location and proximity to higher-performing schools. For example, Cameron (O5) explained, “The school districts were a large factor in determining what kind of area we wanted to live in. We heard the schools were pretty good in the Scripps Ranch and Poway area, and so that’s where we decided to buy.” Similarly, officer families like Miriam (O4) and Kenzie (O3) cited the ability to maintain continuity in private education systems, further emphasizing how financial flexibility enables tailored educational choices.

Alternatively, enlisted families frequently face financial constraints that limit these same options, forcing them to prioritize affordability over educational quality. Rose (E6) shared, “We live an hour away from base because that’s what we could afford, but it makes everything harder - school, appointments, everything.” Grace (E7) also noted, “We had to choose between better housing further away or closer but much more expensive, so we chose the cheaper option.” These financial constraints are compounded by systemic challenges such as losing benefits as rank increases, as Rose noted: “When we were first class, we qualified for WIC, but as soon as he became chief, we no longer did, even though we had one more child.”

A summary of BAH and base pay by rank was shown in Table 6, illustrating this stark discrepancy in financial flexibility between officer and enlisted. For example, an O5’s combined income offers the ability to afford housing in desirable school districts, however an E5’s total compensation barely covers average rental costs in San Diego, leaving limited room for additional educational investments. These discrepancies are exacerbated by the cost of living in San Diego which according to U.S. News & World Report (2024), is the 11th most expensive place in the United States to live. With enlisted being forced to live further from base, this results

in longer commutes and fewer opportunities to engage with school-based resources, further entrenching disparities.

Influence of Spousal Employment

Spousal employment also plays a critical role in shaping access to educational resources. Officer families, with higher overall incomes, are more likely to have a stay-at-home spouse who can dedicate time to navigating school systems, advocating for their children, and participating in school-related activities. Keres (O5) explained, “I could work, but we don’t really need the money. I’d rather stay home and have more flexibility to take care of the kids and stuff.” This flexibility provides officer families with additional resources to bridge gaps in formal systems.

In contrast, enlisted families often face trade-offs when a spouse opts to pause employment. Rose (E6) described her decision to stay home: “I would work, but my husband was like, you know, just take a break and be with the children.” While this decision allowed her to focus on childcare, it came at the cost of sustaining private schooling for her children. These choices highlight how financial limitations tied to rank influence not only educational decisions but also a family’s capacity to engage fully with available resources.

Insights and Key Findings

Rank acts as a defining line between officers and enlisted families, with officers benefiting from higher incomes, more housing options, and greater financial freedom to prioritize their children’s education. Enlisted families, on the other hand, are often constrained by the high cost of living in San Diego, forcing difficult choices between proximity to quality schools and affordable housing. These inequities reflect the systemic barriers faced by many mobile populations, where income disparities translate directly into unequal access to opportunities.

This theme also reveals the importance of time in service and spousal employment in shaping families' ability to navigate these barriers. Experienced families leverage accumulated knowledge to overcome logistical challenges, while officer families often have the advantage of a stay-at-home spouse to advocate for and support their children's educational needs. For enlisted families, the absence of these advantages exacerbates disparities, forcing them to rely on less reliable or accessible options. The insights from this theme point to a broader issue: systemic barriers create an uneven playing field that disproportionately impacts enlisted families, while officer families often leverage their rank and resources to mitigate challenges. These disparities are compounded by the lack of targeted support or adaptive policies to address the unique needs of lower-income military families.

A critical unanswered question is whether the increased financial flexibility enjoyed by officer families translates into significantly better educational outcomes for their children. Although officer families perceive their ability to invest in private schooling or live in districts with better public schools as beneficial, there is limited evidence from this study on the extent to which these choices yield superior educational experiences or outcomes compared to those available to enlisted families. Officer families' perceptions of improved access and quality might not fully align with measurable differences in academic achievement or long-term benefits. Further research is needed to examine whether and how these financial investments create meaningful advantages for their children.

Theme 4: Educational Decisions Reflect Structural Barriers

Educational choices for Navy families in San Diego are shaped far more by systemic barriers than personal preferences. These barriers, ranging from housing affordability to school district quality, create a framework in which families must navigate complex trade-offs, often

prioritizing stability and access over ideals especially for enlisted families. The dynamics of rank, financial resources, and support systems available, whether formal or informal, becomes central to their ability to overcome these obstacles and ensure continuity in their children's education. This theme addresses the following research question 1a: What Were the Key Moments of Decision-Making During this Process?

Key Moments of Decision-Making During the Process

The data from Chapter four indicate that decision-making for military families revolves around structural barriers that influence four distinct but interconnected areas: health, safety, and well-being considerations; family and resource-based decision-making; educational support service decisions; and resource-driven educational decisions. Each of these areas' sheds light on how systemic factors dictate choices that, on the surface, appear to be based on preference but are constrained by external factors.

Health, Safety, and Well-Being Considerations

Concerns about health, safety, and emotional well-being frequently drive educational decisions for Navy families. For instance, Rose prioritized her daughter's safety after experiencing bullying at her previous school, stating that finding a safer environment became her top priority. Similarly, Violet emphasized the importance of additional support during her spouse's absences, bringing her mother to live with her to help care for her three children. These decisions underscore how families must address immediate risks and stressors, often drawing on personal networks and self-advocacy to fill gaps left by formal systems. The emotional and physical toll of frequent relocations further highlights the resilience required to navigate these challenges.

Family and Resource-Based Decision Making

Leveraging family and community support systems is a critical strategy for overcoming the challenges of military life. Extended family members, for example often play a pivotal role in providing stability during transitions or deployments. For example, Cameron shared how having his parents move in helped support his dual-active-duty household, while Rose discussed how she stayed with her parents during her husband's relocation to maintain continuity in their child's education. Additionally, community networks, including both formal services like Fleet and Family Support Services, and informal services such as social media groups, also provide critical guidance and are factored into key decision making for Navy spouses. Charlotte for example reflected on her preference for nonmilitary resources, emphasizing how her educational background enabled her to independently navigate school systems. These decisions reflect the adaptability of Navy families as they blend formal and informal resources to create supportive environments for their children.

Educational Support Services Decisions

Advocacy for special accommodation and educational continuity emerged as another key moment in the decision-making process for the six out of 12 participants who have children and who require additional educational support (see Table 1). For example, Eloise shared her proactive approach to securing a 504 plan for her child, recognizing the importance of portable documentation to ensure consistency across school systems. Kenzie, by contrast, described her adversarial journey to secure dyslexia accommodation for her daughter, highlighting the persistence required to navigate formal systems. Keres's foresight in aligning curricula ahead of a planned relocation illustrates how military families must plan extensively to address the gaps created by frequent moves. These examples demonstrate the importance of Navy families

advocating for their own needs to address the burdens placed on them in a system that often lacks the flexibility or awareness to support military-specific challenges.

Resource-Driven Educational Decisions

Resource-driven decisions reflect the socioeconomic disparities between officers and enlisted families. Officer families, who often have greater financial flexibility, are more likely to prioritize school quality when choosing housing. For instance, Cameron described how the quality of schools in Scripps Ranch influenced his family's decisions to buy a home there. Enlisted families, on the other hand, frequently cited financial limitations as a driving factor in their choices, often prioritizing affordability over access to high-quality schools. Natali noted the trade-offs her family faced when they chose to move further from the base to afford a house, emphasizing how cost constraints shaped their decisions. These disparities illustrate how rank and financial capacity create inequities in access to educational opportunities.

Insights and Key Findings

These key moments reveal the resilience of military families in navigating structural barriers while addressing the inequities inherent in the system. Officer families' greater financial flexibility allows them to prioritize educational opportunities, whereas enlisted families must make trade-offs that often limit their children's options. Additionally, the burden of advocacy placed on Navy families reflects systemic inefficiencies that fail to adequately support military-specific challenges.

Future research should explore the long-term outcomes of these decision-making strategies, particularly the sustainability of informal networks and the extent to which disparities in resource access impact educational equity. Comparisons to other highly mobile populations

could also provide valuable insights into how structural barriers affect different communities and inform strategies to improve systemic support across diverse populations.

Discussion of Findings and Inferences

This study posed several questions aimed at understanding how Navy families in San Diego navigate the complexities of navigating educational resources. These questions explored the role of formal and informal networks, the influence of systemic barriers, and the impact of rank and socioeconomic status on educational decisions. Answering these questions led to several insights:

- Selective trust is foundational to resource navigation for highly mobile families, enabling them to manage information overload and identify credible sources within networks.
- Linking social capital is an important asset for Navy families. However, systemic barriers, such as unclear communication and logistical inefficiencies, often push families to rely on informal networks for solutions.
- Rank and financial flexibility exacerbate educational inequalities, shaping access to housing and resources, especially in high-cost areas like San Diego.
- Educational decisions are shaped more by systemic barriers than individual preferences, requiring self-advocacy and family support systems to bridge gaps and ensure stability.

These inferences drawn from the data and themes led me to conclude several findings which reveal a nuanced understanding of how Navy families navigate the complexities of formal and informal networks to navigate educational resources for their children. These conclusions highlight the adaptability of military families who skillfully blend formal and informal networks, leveraging multiple forms of social capital to do so.

Selective trust emerges as a vital mechanism, enabling families to filter information and navigate resources within networks. Yet, the uneven accessibility of consistent informal networks and the fragility of trust in formal systems amplify disparities, particularly for families with fewer resources or limited social capital. Similarly, rank and financial flexibility act as powerful determinants of opportunity, with officer families often leveraging their advantages to access better educational resources while enlisted families face constrained choices and heightened vulnerabilities.

Together these findings point to a broader narrative of resilience and resourcefulness within a system that does not fully meet the needs of its most vulnerable members. This natural progression of findings lays the foundation for a comparative analysis of how the lived experiences of military families might offer a broader understanding of other transient populations.

Selective Trust as a Mechanism for Rapid Network Adaption

Selective trust plays an important role in helping military spouses navigate networks amidst their unique transient lifestyle. However, unlike Putnam's view of Social Capital which emphasizes that trust and social networks develop slowly over time, military families must rapidly assess the trustworthiness of another individual or resources to adapt to a new area. Due to frequent relocations, military spouses must rely on bounded solidarity, mutual obligations, and peer validation to establish networks that are both functional and reliable. As Violet shares, "you gravitate towards spouses. You automatically have so much in common, so you understand that person." This example highlights the immediacy of trust-building and the importance in establishing social capital amongst military spouses.

Drawing from Coleman's (1988) emphasis on "obligations, expectations, and the trustworthiness of social structures" (p. 102), as well as Putnam's (2000) concepts of bonding and bridging social capital, it becomes clear that military spouses use selective trust as both a survival mechanism and a resource-building strategy. Miriam highlighted this dynamic, noting, "We're all living the same kind of life, so it's easy to trust other spouses." This shared understanding or bounded solidarity creates strong mutual obligations within military spouse communities and allows them to bypass the typically prolonged process of trust building observed in stable communities (Coleman, 1988; Sensenbrenner & Portes, 2011). According to Coleman (1988), the correlation is in obligation not necessarily time of establishment, meaning that military spouses can establish high levels of capital even if these obligations are formed within a compressed time frame.

Social media platforms further illustrate how selective trust can accelerate the trust-building process amongst Navy spouses. Miriam noted, "I just look on Facebook for anything that I need-what schools there are, where's the best place to go." Similarly, Amelia explained, "Facebook groups for the area seem to be the easiest way for me to get information." These platforms not only enable spouses to access critical information but also allow them to form and keep networks regardless of location. Diminescu (2008) describes this phenomenon as the "connected migrant" highlighting how mobile populations remain interconnected through digital platforms. For Navy spouses, leveraging this connectivity is essential to accessing reliable educational information and navigating new areas effectively. Granovetter's (1973) concept of weak ties adds an additional dimension here: informal connections through social media groups often serve as bridges to valuable resources or information that may not be accessible through close-knit bonding ties. For Navy spouses, leveraging these weak ties is essential to navigating

new areas effectively, providing access to diverse perspectives and opportunities within a highly mobile context.

This accelerated trust-building process is not without its challenges. Even though spouses rely on selective trust, they also must navigate many inefficient formal support systems. Procedural barriers compel many to rely on informal networks for reliable information. For example, Miriam described why she has turned away from formal networks, “when I tried to use military resources, I would get pointed in weird directions which would lead me to rabbit holes. I would end up just getting frustrated- so now I don’t use military resources at all.”

Although Putnam’s (2000) framework may initially appear at odds with the experience of military families given the instability of their communities, selective trust reveals how social capital adapts to transient contexts. The blending of weak ties (Granovetter, 1973) with bonding and linking social capital demonstrates the resilience and adaptability of military families as they navigate systemic barriers. These findings offer insights into the experiences of other transient populations who similarly rely on accelerated trust-building processes to maintain stability.

Unlike military families, these families may lack institutional frameworks such as the Navy’s formal support systems, leaving them to rely on informal networks and community resources. For example., immigrant families may face heightened challenges in accessing resources due to systemic barriers or discrimination (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014; Yosso, 2005). These differences highlight a key distinction: military families have a structured institutional framework to draw from, even if access is uneven, whereas other highly mobile groups may need to construct their networks from scratch. This finding suggests that selective trust is a universal mechanism for navigating mobility-related challenges.

Inequities in Resource Accessibility

This study reveals disparities in resource accessibility within the Navy community. These disparities are driven by socioeconomic barriers faced by enlisted families, rank-based differences in navigation, and a disconnect between resources offered and those effectively accessed. These findings align with and extend existing literature on social capital, confirming its dual role as both a facilitator and perpetuation of inequality.

Disconnect Between Resources Offered and Accessed

Despite the availability of over 40 formal resources offered by just four military representatives, Navy families relied on a much lower subset. Navy families, including the seasoned ones, were very surprised at the number of resources offered by the military that are often overlooked. Keres's comment, "How come we are only just learning about these resources?" reflects systemic communication failures that hinder equitable access to support. Although military families still rely heavily on linking social capital in the form of accessing formal networks, it just isn't military formal networks. These gaps in awareness and accessibility point to a broader issue: the erosion of linking social capital within formal military networks. Similar phenomena have been observed during disaster relief contexts, such as after the Kobe earthquake in Japan, where diminished trust in institutions led communities to rely heavily on bonding social capital for survival and recovery (Nakagawa & Shaw, 2004).

Key reasons for this disconnect include barriers to access, overly complicated systems, and a lack of effective communication. Informal networks, on the other hand, are perceived as more convenient and efficient, offering what participants described as "one-stop solutions." Military families often turn to informal resources to navigate formal systems or access the support they need. For instance, spouses reported turning to social media groups or peers for

advice on navigating complex military programs or finding reliable contacts within formal institutions.

This blending of formal and informal networks represents a nuanced strategy not fully captured in previous literature. While existing research highlights the reliance on both networks by military families (Mancini et al., 2018; O’Neal et al., 2020), my findings reveal a more integrated approach: informal networks are used as gateways to formal resources, compensating for the inefficiencies and disconnects in the military's formal systems. This adaptation illustrates how military families strategically combine bonding, bridging, and linking social capital to overcome structural barriers, aligning with and expanding upon prior studies on how highly mobile populations navigate resource challenges.

Socioeconomic Disparities

The socioeconomic disparities between officers and enlisted personnel in the Navy contribute to inequities in resource accessibility. Officers often benefit from higher income levels, better housing options and greater financial flexibility allowing them to choose where they live and associated schooling choice. Enlisted families, on the other hand, frequently face financial constraints that limit their housing options, forcing them to live farther from base in less integrated civilian communities.

This geographic separation exacerbates disparities in accessing resources, as families living closer to military bases have more immediate access to formal and informal networks critical for navigating the unique challenges of military life. For example, officers’ families often reside in neighborhoods with more stable and affluent communities, which, as Sensenbrenner and Portes (2011), and Yosso (2005) suggest, are adept at fostering expansive networks of support and collective efficacy. These networks enable families to leverage bridging and linking

social capital to navigate institutional systems effectively. In contrast, enlisted families residing farther from bases may experience isolation and face barriers to forming or accessing networks, making it harder to obtain necessary educational, social, and emotional resources.

This dynamic sets military families apart from other highly mobile groups, such as immigrant families, who often choose to settle near familial or cultural networks to ensure support and resource-sharing. While immigrant families may have the flexibility to move to areas with lower costs of living, military families are constrained by duty station assignments in high-cost regions like San Diego, where limited base housing forces some to live far from the core military community. This geographic distance disrupts access to the grassroots support systems and communal bonds described by Yosso (2005), leaving enlisted families more dependent on their immediate family networks or limited local resources.

Military families also differ from other highly mobile groups in their reliance on institutional frameworks, such as the Navy's formal support systems, to bridge resource gaps. However, as shown in this study, these formal systems often fall short, leaving families to rely heavily on informal networks for practical solutions. While immigrant or refugee communities may face similar challenges with institutional trust, they often have greater autonomy in constructing networks that are culturally or economically aligned. For military families, the imposed structure of relocation adds an additional layer of constraint, making the disconnect between available resources and accessed resources even more pronounced. Although San Diego is one of the largest military bases in America, these results may not be the case for every Navy base warranting further research into the experiences of Navy families across diverse geographic locations.

Limitations

The limitations of this study highlight several areas that warrant further exploration. First, the study would have benefited from including perspectives from the policy side of the Navy to better understand why these gaps in resource access occur and what initiatives are being undertaken to address them. Insights into the effectiveness of these initiatives and the Navy's internal data provided versus accessed resources could have added depth to the analysis. Additionally, the findings may not be generalizable to the broader Navy population due to the focus on families in San Diego, a region characterized by its high cost of living and unique challenges.

Bias is another potential limitation, particularly given the reliance on self-reported data and my dual role as a Navy spouse and veteran. Being deeply embedded in the military community may have influenced the interpretation of findings. Furthermore, this study exclusively focuses on Navy families, overlooking differences across other branches of the military. My pilot study indicated that other branches exhibit unique policies, cultures, and support structures, which influence how military families navigate formal and informal networks. A broader exploration of these variables is necessary to understand resource navigation across the military.

Another limitation is the absence of data on educational outcomes. Although the study demonstrates that officers often have the financial means to choose higher-quality schools, this study does not explore whether these choices translate into better academic or long-term outcomes for their children. Educational success is influenced by numerous factors beyond school quality, such as parental involvement, access to extracurricular opportunities, and individual student needs, none of which were examined in this study. Understanding the

relationship between these factors and student achievement would provide a more comprehensive understanding of their impact.

The study also does not delve into the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, gender, or disability within the experiences of Navy families. These factors undoubtedly add complexity to the challenges faced by families and could offer a richer understanding of how systemic barriers disproportionately impact specific subgroups within the military community.

Finally, although this study examines barriers within formal systems, it does not explore the internal dynamics of these systems, including their outreach strategies and policies. Understanding how formal Navy systems operate, including the reasons behind their inefficiencies, could provide valuable insights into potential solutions. These limitations suggest the need for future research to address these gaps and broaden the understanding of how military families navigate systemic challenges.

Conclusion

This study provides a nuanced understanding of how Navy families in San Diego navigate formal and informal educational resources upon relocation. Through answering the research questions, themes of trust-based bonding, systemic inefficiencies, resilience, and adaptability emerged. The findings discuss the critical role of selective trust as a mechanism for rapid network adaptation, enabling military families to locate, filter and identify credible resources amidst frequent relocations. This rapid trust-building, facilitated by weak ties and digital connectivity, contrasts with traditional social capital frameworks and demonstrates the unique pressures and strategies of Navy families.

At the same time, the findings reveal significant disparities in resource accessibility shaped by rank, socioeconomic status, and geographic proximity. Officer families, with their

financial flexibility and institutional connections, navigate systemic barriers with relative ease, while enlisted families face heightened vulnerabilities, often relying on immediate networks and informal support systems to bridge gaps. These inequities are compounded by systemic communication failures and inefficiencies in formal military resources, leading families to creatively blend formal and informal networks to meet their needs

These findings contribute to the broader literature on social capital by emphasizing how military families adapt bridging, bonding, and linking social capital in transient contexts, providing insights applicable to other highly mobile populations. Unlike military families, groups such as refugees or migrant workers may lack structured institutional support, highlighting both the adaptability and constraints unique to military experience. By exploring how selective trust, weak ties, and blending of social capital operate in these contexts, this study not only deepens the understanding of military families' experiences but also offers strategies for designing more equitable and effective support systems for other transient populations. Suggestions for policy and implications of these findings will be discussed in greater depth in the following chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

These findings have significant implications for research, theory, practice, and policy. Together they offer insights that extend social capital theory, propose actionable recommendations for military and other transient families, and suggest avenues for future exploration to improve equitable resource accessibility. Additionally, these implications highlight the importance of addressing systemic barriers that disproportionately impact vulnerable groups within transient populations.

Theoretical Implications

This study offers a significant contribution to the field of social capital theory by extending its applicability from Navy families to other transient populations. By exploring how Navy families navigate formal and informal networks to access educational resources, the findings challenge traditional frameworks, providing new insights into the adaptability of social capital in dynamic contexts. This study also provides the foundation for further theoretical exploration of how social capital operates under external constraints, such as geographic mobility or institutional limitations, which are distinct from voluntary migration patterns.

Expanding the Dynamics of Social Capital Formation

This study extends existing frameworks, such as Putnam's (2000) emphasis on the gradual development of trust and Coleman's (1988) focus on the role of obligations and expectations by demonstrating how rapid selective trust enables military families to rapidly form and adapt social capital in response to frequent relocations. Unlike stable communities where trust and social capital evolve over time, the transient lifestyle of military families necessitates immediate trust-building to navigate new environments and information effectively.

This urgency is equally evident in military children, who must quickly forge friendships to navigate the social complexities of adolescence. My own children recognize this adaptation all too well with both ups and downs in how they process it. These rapid adaptations represent a significant departure from traditional social capital theories, which often assume a slow, cumulative process for trust and relationship-building. In military life, there is nothing slow about how challenges are handled. One thing this study has taught me, and deeply validated, is that as a military spouse, you must learn to advocate for yourself and your family, or you risk losing out on essential resources and opportunities. Advocacy is not optional; it is a necessary skill for navigating the complexities of military life. This study underscores the dynamic, fast-paced nature of social capital formation within military communities, highlighting the resilience, adaptability, and relentless advocacy required to thrive in a lifestyle defined by constant mobility.

Socioeconomic Disparities and Social Capital

Socioeconomic disparities are a pervasive challenge within military communities, shaped by the rank-driven structure and subsequent socio-economic division of the military. These disparities profoundly influence access to resources, opportunities, and networks that families depend on to navigate the demands of military life. When I was active duty, one of the unwritten rules was to avoid fraternizing with those outside of our rank. Although spouses are not bound by the same rules, many follow them, whether consciously or out of habit, reinforcing social divides. This dynamic creates close-knit, rank-based networks that foster strong emotional bonds but limit exposure to more diverse resources. For enlisted families, these networks, while vital for emotional support, often struggle to bridge resource gaps, such as accessing specialized educational services, financial counseling, or other critical resources.

My findings validate existing research such as Lancee's (2010) work regarding marginalized groups, which demonstrates their struggle to convert bonding capital into tangible resources. Similarly, Portes (1998), highlights the dual role of social capital: it can serve as a vital resource for marginalized communities but also perpetuate inequality when bridging or linking capital is absent. If you're not actively advocating for yourself or your family, you risk being left out of critical opportunities and resources, a reality that my own experiences, as well as the voices of participants in this study, have made abundantly clear.

This study explores how these socioeconomic disparities shape the ability of military families to leverage social capital effectively. Although bonding capital provides emotional support and resilience, it alone is insufficient for fostering social or economic mobility. To address this gap, targeted interventions that enhance access to bridging and linking social capital are essential. By examining the systemic barriers that limit resource access for enlisted families, this research underscores the urgent need for equitable policies and support systems that empower all military families, regardless of rank or socioeconomic status.

Geographic Constraints and Social Capital

The concept of geographic distance and its impact on resource accessibility adds a new dimension to the understanding of social capital. Although previous research (Putnam, 2000) emphasizes the importance of proximity in fostering social capital, this study reveals the unique challenges faced by military families who are geographically dispersed due to institutional demands. Unlike other transient populations, such as migrant workers or refugees, military families not only cannot freely choose their locations but are often displaced over large distances which limits their ability to establish bridging and linking capital.

For example, after recently receiving orders to Tennessee, my family began preparing for a new chapter to include buying a dog, confident we would finally be staying (in the continental United States, applied to schools, researched extracurricular activities, and even secured a rental house. However, everything changed when we received an order modification which has us moving to Japan. Although we have lived in Japan and had established connections there, those relationships have since changed because those people have also moved, as is common in the military. Additionally, my children are now older and have more complex academic needs, requiring a fresh investment of time and effort to navigate new educational resources in an international setting.

My experience, as well as many others, identifies the unique and recurring challenges faced by military families, whose lives are often upended by external factors beyond their control. It also highlights how the evolving needs of children and the constant turnover of social networks exacerbate the difficulty of building and maintaining social capital. These realities emphasize the importance of reexamining how social capital is conceptualized for populations constrained by institutional demands, such as duty station assignments, where the ability to build and sustain networks is continually disrupted by geographic relocation and advocates for the need of more streamlined accessible resources across international spaces.

Integrating Formal and Informal Networks

My research demonstrates the adaptability of military families in blending formal institutional resources with informal community support, offering a more nuanced view of linking social capital. Previous research (Aldrich, 2012; Nakagawa & Shaw, 2004) has shown that in the time of crisis or transient contexts, populations may abandon one form of capital (such as formal systems), when accessibility or trust breaks down, relying instead on bonding capital

for survival. In contrast, this study demonstrates that Navy families do not simply “drop” resources altogether but sometimes drop them due to systemic inefficiencies. For example, participants described formal systems as overly complicated and ineffective, leading them to rely primarily on informal networks such as social media groups or peer recommendations.

This demonstrates a strategic reliance on informal networks as gateways to formal resources. This strategy is both resourceful but also demonstrates the fragility of formal linking social capital which as demonstrated by this study, can further exacerbate inequities, particularly for families with limited social capital. These findings challenge the traditional understanding of linking capital as exclusively tied to formal systems and instead highlight the contextual variability and adaptability of social capital for transient populations.

Implications for Broader Social Capital Theory

These findings suggest that traditional frameworks of social capital may inadequately address the experiences of institutionally bound, transient populations such as military families. By highlighting the connection between formal and informal networks, the reliance on selective trust, and the role of geographic constraints, this study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how social capital operates in dynamic and resource-constrained environments. These insights have broader implications for other transient groups, such as immigrants or displaced populations, who similarly face challenges in accessing institutional resources while navigating systemic barrier

Practical Implications

Several practical recommendations arose from this study given the large number of military connected, migrant, immigrant, and homeless K-12 children in San Diego. These recommendations stem from my own experience as a K-12 educator and a mother of three

military connected children. Recommendations include a need for streamlined access to formal resources, improved communication and addressing housing inequities. These recommendations are not specific to Navy Families, and implementation of these changes could improve equitable access to resources for all transient members living in San Diego.

Streamlined Access to Formal Resources

A critical recommendation is the need for streamlined access to formal resources. Participants identified a disconnect between available resources and what families can effectively access due to convoluted systems and lack of awareness. To address this, the Navy should develop a centralized, user-friendly digital platform that integrates formal resources with peer-validated recommendations. This platform could act as a “one-stop solution” for families navigating educational challenges and reduce their reliance on informal networks for credible information.

Recognizing the existing Navy Facebook pages, these platforms should be restructured to prioritize easy navigation and efficient information access. Instead of scrolling through numerous posts, families should have access to an organized, searchable database featuring verified, up-to-date information on housing, educational support, and available resources. These revamped Facebook groups, combined with officially moderated content, should also be promoted through commands, Ombudsman, and command sponsors upon moving to new areas. Developing an easily accessible digital interface would address the issues of misinformation and fragmented communication often present in spouse-led groups.

Enhancing Resource Communication

Clear and consistent communication about available resources is essential for supporting Navy families, yet this study revealed significant gaps in how information is shared. Many

participants were surprised to learn about long-standing resources, highlighting a serious issue with how the Navy communicates with families. These gaps in communication leave families uninformed and create obstacles to accessing resources, particularly for those dealing with frequent relocations and institutional challenges.

One major concern is the role of the command Ombudsman, who acts as a critical link between Navy families and command leadership. When we joined my husband's command, there wasn't an Ombudsman in place for over a year. Instead, the ship had to "borrow" an ombudsman from another command for emergencies. This situation shows how unreliable this resource can be. While I have met many incredible Ombudsmen who provided valuable support, their level of involvement and the information they share often depend on their personal approach. This inconsistency points to larger problems with how the Navy supports and structures the ombudsman program.

Currently, Ombudsmen are unpaid volunteers, which contributes to uneven involvement, lack of oversight, and varying levels of engagement. Considering the significant responsibilities of this position, the Navy should explore making it a paid role. This change would allow the Navy to provide better training and set clear accountability measures, such as requiring regular updates on outreach efforts and resource distribution. Paid Ombudsmen would have the time and resources to ensure families consistently receive accurate and timely information. These changes would not only keep families better informed but also build trust in Navy support systems, creating a stronger foundation for families to thrive, regardless of their location or circumstances.

Addressing Housing Inequalities

One of the most pressing issues highlighted by this study is the urgent need to address housing shortages on or near base for military families, especially those facing financial

limitations. Geographic proximity to base is more than just a convenience; it's a lifeline that fosters community bonds, provides emotional support, and ensures access to critical resources like childcare, schools, and healthcare. Yet, for many enlisted families, the rising cost of housing forces them to live farther away, isolating them from these essential networks and increasing the challenges they face.

I've seen families struggle with this firsthand - parents and sailors waking up hours earlier to navigate long commutes, children missing out on base programs that offer continuity during relocations, and families juggling the stress of financial strain alongside the demands of military life. For many, the dream of living close to the community that understands their unique challenges feels completely out of reach. To address this, the Navy must prioritize expanding on-base housing options and significantly reducing waiting times, which often leave families in limbo. For those unable to access on-base housing, financial assistance or subsidies should be offered to help enlisted families afford housing closer to the base. This isn't just about convenience; it's about ensuring that military families—who already sacrifice so much—have a stable and supportive foundation from which to thrive.

Minimizing Educational Gaps through Adaptable K12 Curriculum

Imagine a child who has already faced the upheaval of leaving friends and familiar routines behind, only to walk into a new classroom where they feel behind, or worse, ahead but unchallenged. This is an all too familiar scenario for military and highly mobile families who are already dealing with the challenges and stress of moving to a new area. Developing a mobile curriculum that adapts to the needs of students in military families could minimize these gaps by aligning state-specific standards, incorporating flexible learning pathways, and providing a standardized framework for transferring academic progress seamlessly across districts.

To solve this, I propose developing a mobile curriculum that moves with the child, creating a standardized roadmap that ensures continuity in learning. Imagine if, instead of repeating placement tests or struggling to explain prior coursework, a student could simply say, “I was on Level 5 in this program,” and their new school would immediately know what that translates to in their own system. Whether in math, reading, or other core subjects, this framework would align with state standards and provide schools with a clear reference point, ensuring that students pick up exactly where they left off, rather than getting lost in curriculum mismatches.

This curriculum would act as a nationally recognized academic roadmap, aligning learning objectives across all 50 states while still allowing for flexibility in instructional methods. Unlike current systems, where families must navigate a confusing web of differing state standards, this approach would provide a structured, yet adaptable framework for transferring academic progress seamlessly. This initiative could also serve as a model for other transient groups, such as migrant or refugee children, who face similar challenges in maintaining consistent educational experiences. By creating a curriculum that travels with the child, we (educators) can offer them more than knowledge—we can offer them stability, belonging, and the confidence to thrive no matter where life takes them

Policy Implications and Broader Applications

This study provides the foundation for critical policy implications for the military and other highly mobile populations to include systemic improvements in communication, resource accessibility, and equity-focused outreach. These implications can inform both military-specific policy adjustments as well as broader public support systems for highly mobile families.

Military-Specific Policy Implications

One key policy recommendation for the military is to include localized information in deployment orders. Currently, orders sent to service members lack comprehensive guidance for their families and are often written in technical military language. Updated orders should include a dependent-specific information sheet detailing military-friendly schools, local military liaisons, procedures for transferring IEPs, and available academic and medical resources. Such an approach would streamline the transition process for Navy families, providing proactive, equitable access to essential support systems.

Broader Policy Applications for Highly Mobile Populations

For broader populations, such as immigrant or refugee communities, these findings highlight the importance of fostering bridging and linking social capital alongside bonding networks. Policymakers should prioritize programs that facilitate cross-community connections and provide accessible institutional support, particularly in areas where marginalized groups are geographically dispersed. Programs that encourage cross-community connections, such as partnerships between local organizations and institutional support systems, could reduce isolation and improve equity.

Future Research

Future research should explore the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, gender, and disability within military families to better understand how these factors interact with resource navigation. Comparative studies across branches and locations, as well as longitudinal research on educational outcomes, would provide a broader perspective on systemic barriers and trends over time. My initial pilot study revealed discrepancies in how spouses from different branches of service locate and access resources, suggesting that service branch culture, policies, and

support structures may play a role in shaping these experiences. Further research in this area could provide critical insights into branch-specific challenges and best practices.

Additionally, examining how both formal and informal networks influence resource accessibility could inform the design of more effective support systems for military families and other transient populations, such as migrant and refugee communities. Understanding the mechanisms behind bonding, bridging, and linking social capital in different military contexts could improve the way institutions connect families to the resources they need. Finally, future research should explore how institutional trust evolves over time within military communities. Given the high mobility and shifting policies that service members and their families experience, studying how trust is built, eroded, and maintained could offer valuable insights for strengthening long-term support strategies and fostering better relationships between military families and the institutions designed to support them.

Conclusion

This research provides a comprehensive exploration of how Navy families in San Diego navigate formal and informal networks to access educational resources amidst the challenges of frequent relocations. By examining the role of selective trust, the blending of social capital forms, and the systemic barriers faced by these families, this study offers critical insights into the adaptive strategies and inequities experienced by transient populations. These findings not only expand the theoretical framework of social capital but also propose practical and policy-driven solutions to enhance resource accessibility and equity for military families and other mobile groups. Ultimately, this study serves as a reminder of the critical role of social capital in fostering resilience and adaptability in the face of systemic challenges. By understanding the importance of addressing systemic inequities, this study lays the foundation to ensure that all

families, regardless of rank, socioeconomic status, or mobility, have the resources and support needed to thrive. The insights gained here are not only relevant to military families but also offer valuable lessons for addressing the needs of other transient populations in our increasingly mobile world.

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APPENDIX A

**DEPARTMENT OF
LEARNING AND
TEACHING**

Mother Rosalie Hill Hall
5998 Alcalá Park
San Diego, CA 92110-2492
P: (619) 260-5938
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<http://sandiego.edu/teach>

May 21, 2024

Dear Members of the IRB Committee:

I am serving as Faculty Advisor for Lara Ray. I have reviewed this application and approved this research titled “Anchored Networks: Navigating Formal and Informal Pathways to Access Educational Resources in Transient and Military Families”. I certify that the IRB application submitted by my student(s) meets the criteria of the selected IRB review category (expedited) per federal guideline 45 CFR 46.

I am named Secondary Contact on this application and will continue to advise Lara Ray during the IRB review process and throughout the duration of their study.

Sincerely,

James O. Fabionar, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
jfabionar@sandiego.edu

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR MILITARY SPOUSES

Hello, and thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. My name is Lara Ray, and I am a PhD Candidate at the University of San Diego. I am conducting a study to explore the unique challenges military families face in accessing educational resources during relocations. Your insights and experiences are incredibly valuable to this research.

Before we begin, I want to let you know that this interview will be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy in capturing your responses. I will be using my iPhone with the Otter.ai application for this purpose. If you have any concerns about this, please let me know.

* If conducting using Zoom add: [Additionally, since we are conducting this interview via Zoom, I need to ask you to turn off your camera now. This is to ensure that only audio is recorded, which helps protect your privacy.]

Your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary, and you can choose to skip any questions you do not wish to answer or stop the interview at any time without any consequences. Your responses will remain confidential, and all data collected will be anonymized.

Do you have any questions before we start? If not, we can begin with the first question.

Demographic Information

1. Background and Identity:

- Tell me about your background. Where were you born and raised?
- Can you describe your family and is there anything you would like me to know in terms of how you identify?

2. Educational Background:

- Describe your educational background. What kind of school communities did you come from?
- How did these experiences influence what you consider a successful school for your children?

3. Educational Aspirations:

- What are your hopes for your children's education?

Experiences with Relocation

4. Challenges of Relocation:

- Walk me through a recent relocation experience. What were the challenges, and how did it affect your children's education?
- How was the challenge resolved, and who helped you?

5. Access to Educational Resources:

- What are the most significant challenges you face in accessing educational resources due to frequent relocations?

Accessing Educational Resources

6. Successful Resource Utilization:

- Can you share a time when accessing resources was successful? What made it easier?

7. Decision-Making in San Diego:

- How did you decide where to send your children to school in San Diego?
- Do any of your children have specific educational needs? How do you address these?

Formal Networks

8. Interacting with Military and Educational Systems:

- Describe your interactions with military and educational support systems. How effective have these been?
- If you haven't used these, why not? How could the Navy improve resource availability?

Informal Networks

9. Social Group Interactions:

- How do interactions with friends, family, social media groups, and community organizations support your family's educational needs?
- How would you describe the trust level among military spouses in your community?

Equity and Access

10. Rank and Resource Access:

- Have you noticed differences in resource access based on rank? Why do you think this is the case?
- What steps could improve equity in access to educational resources for all military families?

Resource Gaps

11. Identifying Gaps:

- Are there specific educational resources or support services you feel are lacking or difficult to access for military families?

Community Engagement

12. Role of Community:

- How does the military community in your current location support your family's educational needs? What role does community engagement play?

Future Considerations

13. Future Navigation:

- How do you plan to navigate educational resources in future relocations? What strategies will you use?

General Feedback

14. Additional Insights:

- Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experiences with navigating educational resources as a military spouse?
- What advice would you give to other military spouses facing similar challenges?

**University of San Diego
Institutional Review Board**

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT ADULT CONSENT FORM

For the research study entitled: Anchored Networks: Navigating Formal and Informal Pathways to Access Educational Resources in Transient and Military Families

I. PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

Lara Ray is a student in the Schools of Leadership and Educational Sciences at the University of San Diego. You are invited to participate in a research study she is conducting. The purpose of this research study is to understand how Navy families find and use educational resources for their children when they relocate, identifying the challenges and effective strategies they use.

II. WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO

If you decide to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview with me, where I will ask questions about accessing educational resources, using formal and informal networks, and the challenges you face. The interview will have the option of being conducted in person or virtually via Zoom; both with audio recording. If conducted using Zoom, to protect your privacy and to ensure that only audio recording will take place during the interview, you will be asked to have your camera turned OFF before the audio recording takes place. The interview will take approximately 1 hour.

Additionally, you will be asked to join four focus groups. A focus group is a structured discussion with a small group of participants, typically 6-12 people, facilitated by a researcher. In these sessions, guest speakers from Fleet and Family Forces, Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society, Military Liaison, and Ombudsman will present various educational resources available in San Diego. These sessions will allow for discussions and sharing of experiences among participants and will also be audio recorded. Other participants in the focus group may include fellow military spouses who share similar experiences and challenges. These activities will help us gather valuable insights to improve educational support for military families. There are four focus groups and each one is expected to last one hour. A Zoom option will be available for these meetings, however, if you are available to meet in person, we will meet at Murphy Canyon Chapel located at 3200 Sante Fe Road, San Diego, 92124 on the following dates and times:

Focus Group Schedule:

- 23 August 2024, 1700-1800
- 20 September 2024, 1700-1800
- 18 October 2024, 1700-1800
- 08 November 2024, 1700-1800.

Your participation in this study will take a total of five hours.

III. FORESEEABLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS

This study carries a minor mental health risk, as the topics discussed may evoke stress related to navigating educational resources and from past experiences with relocating.

Sometimes when people are asked to think about their feelings, they feel sad or anxious. If you would like to talk to someone about your feelings at any time, you can call toll-free, 24 hours a day: San Diego Access and Crisis Line for mental health support 1-888-724-7240.

IV. BENEFITS

While there may be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study, your participation offers several important indirect benefits. By taking part, you will contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges military spouses face in accessing educational resources. This knowledge can help researchers and policymakers develop better support systems and resources for military families. Additionally, your insights and experiences will be invaluable in shaping recommendations and improvements that can benefit other military spouses and their families. Furthermore, to show appreciation for your time and effort, snacks will be provided at each focus group meeting. Your participation is not only a contribution to valuable research but also an opportunity to engage with and support your community.

V.CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information provided and/or identifying records will remain confidential and kept in a locked file and/or password-protected computer file in the researcher's office for a minimum of five years. All data collected from you will be coded with a pseudonym (fake name). Your real name will not be used. The results of this research project may be made public and information quoted in professional journals and meetings, but information from this study will only be reported as a group, and not individually.

The information or materials you provide will be cleansed of all identifiers (like your name) and **may** be used in future research.

The information shared in the focus group session should not be shared with anyone outside of the group, and the confidentiality of anything you choose to say during the session cannot be guaranteed.

VI. COMPENSATION

You will receive no compensation for your participation in the study.

VII. VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THIS RESEARCH

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You do not have to do this and you can refuse to answer any question or quit at any time. Deciding not to participate or not answering any of the questions will have no effect on any benefits you're entitled to, like your health care, or your employment or grades. **You can withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.**

VIII. CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact either:

1) Lara Ray

USD Email: lararay@san Diego.edu

2) Dr. James Fabionar

USD Email: jfabionar@san Diego.edu

I have read and understand this form, and consent to the research it describes to me. I have received a copy of this consent form for my records.

Signature of Participant

Date

Name of Participant (**Printed**)

Signature of Investigator

Date

FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

Hello everyone, and welcome to our focus group session. My name is Lara Ray, and I am a PhD Candidate at the University of San Diego. Thank you for joining us today. The purpose of this focus group is to discuss the unique challenges military families face in accessing educational resources. Your participation and insights are crucial to this research. Before we start, I want to explain what a focus group is. A focus group is a small group discussion where participants share their thoughts, experiences, and ideas on a specific topic. Today's discussion will help us better understand the resources available to military families and the challenges you face in accessing them. I need to inform you that this session will be audio-recorded using my iPhone with the Otter.ai application to ensure we accurately capture everyone's contributions. If you have any concerns about this, please let me know. Since we are using Zoom, I need to ask everyone to turn off their cameras and change their display names to pseudonyms now. This is to ensure that only audio is recorded and to help protect your privacy. Additionally, I will be handing out a pseudonym to everyone which you will wear around your neck. Please refer to each other's pseudonyms when addressing someone. This is to maintain your confidentiality. It's important to note that while we will take every precaution to maintain the confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus groups prevents us from guaranteeing complete confidentiality. We ask that you respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not share anything discussed in this group with others outside of this session. Your participation is voluntary, and you can choose to skip any questions or leave the session at any time without any consequences. Your responses will be anonymized, and all data will be used solely for research purposes. Do you have any questions before we begin? If not, we will start with a 20-30 minute presentation of educational resources by a representative from Fleet and Family Services, Navy Marine Corps Relief

Society, an Ombudsman, and a Military Liaison. After the presentation, we will have a discussion using the guiding questions.

Thank you again for your participation. Let's begin with the presentation.

Presentation

Following the presentation, the following questions may be used to prompt discussion amongst the wives.

1. Awareness of Resources:

- a. “Were you aware of the resources that were just presented? Which ones have you heard of or used before?”

Follow-up: “Which resources were new to you?”

2. Usage and Experience:

- a. “For those resources you have heard of or used, can you share your experiences with them? Were they helpful?”

Follow-up: “Have you had any success in using these resources?”

3. Challenges in Accessing Resources:

- a. “What challenges have you encountered when trying to access these resources?”

Follow-up: “How did you overcome these challenges, if at all?”

4. Improving Access to Resources:

- a. “What do you think could be done to make these resources easier to access for military families?”

Follow-up: “Are there any specific barriers you think need to be addressed?”

5. Suggestions for Additional Resources:

- a. “Are there any additional resources you wish the Navy provided to support military families, especially regarding educational needs?”

Follow-up: “What specific types of support would be most beneficial for you and your family?”

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR MILITARY SPOUSES

Hello, and thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. My name is Lara Ray, and I am a PhD Candidate at the University of San Diego. I am conducting a study to explore the unique challenges military families face in accessing educational resources during relocations. Your insights and experiences are incredibly valuable to this research. Before we begin, I want to let you know that this interview will be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy in capturing your responses. I will be using my iPhone with the Otter.ai application for this purpose. If you have any concerns about this, please let me know.

* If conducting using Zoom add: [Additionally, since we are conducting this interview via Zoom, I need to ask you to turn off your camera now. This is to ensure that only audio is recorded, which helps protect your privacy.]

Your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary, and you can choose to skip any questions you do not wish to answer or stop the interview at any time without any consequences. Your responses will remain confidential, and all data collected will be anonymized.

Do you have any questions before we start? If not, we can begin with the first question.

Demographic Information

1. Background and Identity:

- Tell me about your background. Where were you born and raised?
- Can you describe your family and is there anything you would like me to know in terms of how you identify?

2. Educational Background:

- Describe your educational background. What kind of school communities did you come from?
- How did these experiences influence what you consider a successful school for your children?

3. Educational Aspirations:

- What are your hopes for your children's education?

Experiences with Relocation

4. Challenges of Relocation:

- Walk me through a recent relocation experience. What were the challenges, and how did it affect your children's education?
- How was the challenge resolved, and who helped you?

5. Access to Educational Resources:

- What are the most significant challenges you face in accessing educational resources due to frequent relocations?

Accessing Educational Resources

6. Successful Resource Utilization:

- Can you share a time when accessing resources was successful? What made it easier?

7. Decision-Making in San Diego:

- How did you decide where to send your children to school in San Diego?
- Do any of your children have specific educational needs? How do you address these?

Formal Networks

8. Interacting with Military and Educational Systems:

- Describe your interactions with military and educational support systems. How effective have these been?

- If you haven't used these, why not? How could the Navy improve resource availability?

Informal Networks

9. Social Group Interactions:

- How do interactions with friends, family, social media groups, and community organizations support your family's educational needs?
- How would you describe the trust level among military spouses in your community?

Equity and Access

10. Rank and Resource Access:

- Have you noticed differences in resource access based on rank? Why do you think this is the case?
- What steps could improve equity in access to educational resources for all military families?

Resource Gaps

11. Identifying Gaps:

- Are there specific educational resources or support services you feel are lacking or difficult to access for military families?

Community Engagement

12. Role of Community:

- How does the military community in your current location support your family's educational needs? What role does community engagement play?

Future Considerations

13. Future Navigation:

- How do you plan to navigate educational resources in future relocations? What strategies will you use?

General Feedback

14. Additional Insights:

- Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experiences with navigating educational resources as a military spouse?
- What advice would you give to other military spouses facing similar challenges?

IRB APPROVAL FORM

Date: 1-21-2025

IRB #: IRB-2024-281
Title: Anchored Networks: Navigating Formal and Informal Pathways to Access Educational Resources in Transient and Military Families
Creation Date: 4-16-2024
End Date:
Status: **Approved**
Principal Investigator: Lara Ray
Review Board: USD IRB
Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Expedited	Decision	Approved
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Key Study Contacts

Member	Lara Ray	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	lararay@san Diego.edu
Member	James Fabionar	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	jfabionar@san Diego.edu