

Reserve Retention:

The Influence of Job Satisfaction on Military Reserve Service Member Re-enlistment and Retention

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Abstract

The ability and readiness of military units to engage in needed operations and missions, both in support of civil authorities and abroad remain important to military leaders and governments around the world. Military organizations serve to support allies, serve as the strategic arm of power for countries that need to defend borders from aggression, and in many cases provide additional policing or disaster response. Since the onset of the all-volunteer force in 1973, the United States (US) military has faced periods of challenges with both recruitment and retention. There is currently a high turnover rate within the military in both enlisted members and officers, which equates to not only a financial loss of trained personnel, but also the loss of experience gained during the multiple conflicts and disaster responses of the last two decades.

Based on the increased importance of reserve component organizations, and the recent challenges they face with retention, the purpose of this study is to identify variables that can influence *intent to re-enlist* by service members of the reserve component that could improve retention and overall personnel readiness. This study analyzed multiple job satisfaction variables that could impact the intent to re-enlist by reserve component service members. This quantitative study was conducted using an online survey as the instrument to determine correlation between multiple independent job satisfaction variables with intent to re-enlist. The significance of this study for policy makers, governmental leadership, and future researchers is to identify factors or trends in these multiple variables that could allow commanders at all levels to implement changes in policy, prioritization of resources, or changes in methods to increase retention and overall personnel readiness.

Introduction

Military organizations serve as the strategic arm of power for countries to defend borders from aggression, support allies, and in many cases provide additional law enforcement or disaster response. The US military has faced many global and domestic challenges over the last two decades that have required the continuous use of National Guard forces in support of operations, creating concerns over retention and readiness of these units (Chun, 2005). US reserve component forces are now crucial in the support contingency operations abroad, local disaster response, and in support of federal, state and local law enforcement all at a fraction of the cost when compared to active duty counterparts (The Reserve Component as an Operational Force, 2011). The task of maintaining military readiness by National Guard and Reserve units due to this enhanced role has become exponentially important to national security (Wormuth et al., 2006). Though the cost to train and maintain proficiency of reserve soldiers annually is less

than one third of the costs of active duty counterparts, there is still a large amount of funding required to train soldiers and units to maintain proficiency (The Reserve Component as an Operational Force, 2011). The average cost to train a soldier to perform military skill before they even arrive at the unit, or initial training, is in excess of \$150,000 per service member, combined with the additional cost of \$140,000 to \$500,000 spent annually on active military members, it is important to retain the skills and knowledge of qualified soldiers (Dahlman, 2007). Though the annual cost is significantly less for National Guard members, the initial training cost is the same for all military members before arriving at the first unit, as the requirements to become a soldier trained in a military occupational skill (MOS) are without regard to component or status.

Since the onset of the all-volunteer force in 1973, the military has faced periods of challenges with both recruitment and retention, especially since the onset of the War on Terror (Chun, 2005). There is currently a high turnover rate within the military in both enlisted members and officers, which equates to not only a financial loss of trained personnel, but also the loss of experience gained during the conflicts of the last decade. Studies show that Army retention missed its recruiting goals during the period 2004-2007, and would have missed these goals by as high as 20% if not for high retention bonuses and *stop loss*, which was a policy of forcibly retaining service members beyond the original agreed period of enlistment (Bosse et al., 2011). Given the extensive role of reserve forces in present and future military operations, the retention of trained service members is critical to military readiness in reserve units. Despite the increased role of these units, there is a relatively small amount of research devoted to the study of these organizations. Most military research focuses on active militaries, deployment concerns, or civil military operations, creating a gap in knowledge regarding the challenges and variables faced by reserve component units (Lomesky-Feder et al., 2008).

The purpose of this study was to identify variables that can impact *intent to re-enlist* by service members of the reserve component that could improve retention and overall personnel readiness. Job satisfaction has been heavily studied by researchers, and is a crucial task of management needed to improve loyalty and retention within its organization (Westlund et al., 2008). According to needs theories, there are certain motivations that compel employees to exert a high level of effort toward organizational goals, which can prove useful for organizations that need to align work activities to increase job motivation, performance, and retention. This study assessed job satisfaction to test *intent to re-enlist* of military service members with nine separate constructs based on Alderfer's existence, relatedness, and growth (ERG) theory (Alderfer, 1969).

Review of Literature

There is a sizeable amount of relative literature in regards to workplace retention, job satisfaction, and research on military members (Chun, 2005, Griffith, 2006, Lomesky-Feder et al., 2008). However, research relating to readiness and retention of reserve military members is mostly nonexistent or lacks thorough examination. This next section will therefore cover the background of issues faced by reserve component forces, and an analysis of supporting theories.

Background

The decreased threat of large-scale conflict, skyrocketing costs of military technology, and political demand for reduced military spending at the end of the Cold War led many nations around the world to reduce active duty military, choosing to rely on reserve forces for future conflicts. This trend stretched across most western militaries such as in Britain where reserve forces now make up 52% of overall military strength, or countries like Switzerland, where

reserves are considered crucial in the defense against neighboring countries with much larger populations (Lomesky-Feder et al., 2008). After the attacks on September 11, 2001, reserve military forces—primarily in the form of the Army National Guard—quickly became critical in security operations across the US, and abroad, as large portions of combat forces that deployed in support conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan were reservists (Wormuth et al., 2006).

As the threats against national interest domestically and abroad continued to grow in both scope and complexity, the Department of Defense dealt with the challenge of a decreasing defense budgets and reductions in the size of active military forces. The Department of Defense budget for 2016 was \$585 billion, or just over 3% of GDP, and more than 17% of fiscal spending for the US Government (Department of Defense, n.d.). With the increasing cost of weapons systems, equipment, aircraft, and training, combined with growing populations and increased threats around the world, military organizations are under increased strain. When these issues combine with the political demand for reduced spending due to economic downturns, many Western countries, including the US, are now forced to rely on reserve component forces, as active duty forces are reduced in size and scope due to multiple funding challenges (Lomesky-Feder et al., 2008). Reserve forces on average cost approximately one-third of active counterparts to maintain, and remain available for support of federal and state law enforcement, disaster response, or activation for combat deployments overseas (The Reserve Component as an Operational Force, 2011). The task of maintaining unit readiness by National Guard and Reserve forces has become exponentially important to national security, and retaining these service members once trained is vital to unit readiness and funding constraints. The US Army Reserve, as an example, has an average attrition of more than 25,000 soldiers per year, with a cost of more than \$888 million for recruiting replacements (Bosse et al., 2011).

Analysis of Supporting Theories

Needs Affiliation. It is widely recognized that retention and productivity are related to individual motivation, and the works of researchers such as Maslow, Herzberg, and Alderfer are cornerstones in the field of human motivation (Lord, 2002). According to needs theories, there are certain motivations that compel employees to exert a high level of effort toward organizational goal. Beginning with Maslow's *Motivation and Personality*, published in 1954, and later in Alderfer's Existence, Relatedness and Growth (ERG) Model (1969), human needs were ultimately grouped into three categories of needs with which people affiliate. These need affiliations can prove useful for organizations to align with work activities to increase job motivation, performance, and retention. Alderfer's three groups of needs included (a) existence, (b) relatedness, and (c) growth. Contrary to Maslow's Hierarchy, Alderfer proposes that a lower level need does not have to be gratified for a higher-level need to become relevant (Westlund et al., 2008). While there is some form of hierarchy in the three types of needs, Alderfer's theory opens the door for needs to differ based on individual goal motivations.

Agency Theory. Agency theory describes the relationship between an agent who performs some service or job to meet the desired outcomes of a principal. Agency theory can help provide models to more effectively manage the work outcomes of contract employment. US service members, reserve or active, are actually contracted employees in the form of enlistments and serve as agents to the respective branches, which are the principles in the relationship. Alderfer's model can be applied to the types of factors or incentives used by military organizations to retain reserve component soldiers, viewed within an agency theory framework that views the work of certain work outcomes that impact retention. Since the majority of the research on agency theory focuses on the conflict that arises between the agent and the principle, studies focus primarily on

aligning incentives with work outcomes (Eisenhardt, 1989). Agency theory deals with the problem of organizational management—similar to the problems faced between owners and managers at any firm-by looking at how principles motivate agents for results (Reiners, 1999).

Retention. Most retention studies focus primarily on turnover and link job satisfaction to the intent of individual to search for alternatives, which leads to intention to quit and turnover (Mobley, 1977). The intention to quit is typically preceded by several decisions that individuals make before the decision to leave the organization, with low levels of job satisfaction serving as the catalyst. Mobley’s model (1977) suggests that job satisfaction has a direct influence on thinking of quitting, intention to search for new positions, and intention to quit/stay, but an indirect or mediating influence on actual turnover. Although there is a link between intent to quit or thinking of quitting based on job satisfaction, there is much evidence that suggests that intent to stay is a strong predictor of retention, even more important than job satisfaction alone (Ellenbecker et al., 2008).

Methodology

Three theories-Agency Theory, Maslow’s Hierarchy, and Alderfer’s Needs Theory-and two separate models-ERG and Mobley’s retention model-were used to create the conceptual model that measures job satisfaction and re-enlistment intention by reserve component service members from this online survey. Job satisfaction, defined by Spector as “the extent to which people like (satisfaction) or dislike (dissatisfaction) their jobs (1985),” has been heavily studied by researchers, and is a crucial issue for management in the need to improve loyalty and retention within its organization (Westlund et al., 2008). This quantitative, correlational study assessed job satisfaction, defined as the satisfaction of needs, to test military service members’ *intent to re-enlist* with nine separate constructs based on Alderfer’s ERG theory (Figure 1).

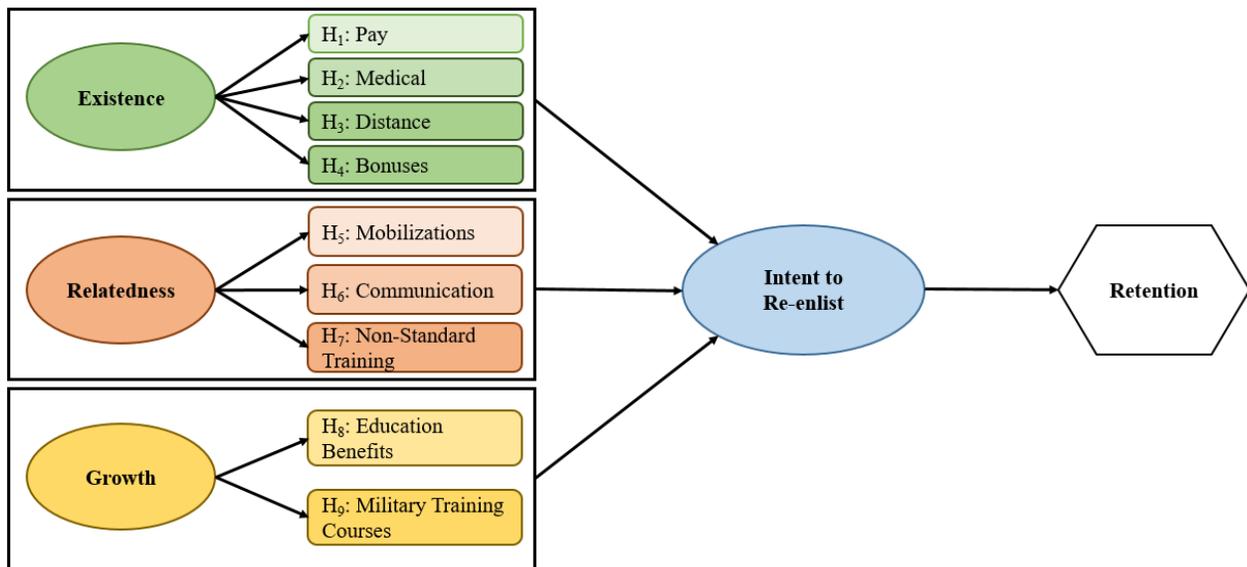


Figure 1: Conceptual framework for the proposed model for military job satisfaction and intent to re-enlist.

The constructs of job satisfaction are existence, relatedness, and growth. The independent variables are pay, medical benefits, distance traveled to training, bonuses, mobilizations, communication, non-standard annual training, education benefits, and attendance in military training courses. The dependent variable is *intent to re-enlist*.

Instrumentation. Previously validated scales were used to measure all components of the research model. The two measurement instruments used were Spector's job satisfaction survey (Spector, 1985) and the *intent to re-enlist* questions used by Griffith in his research on soldier retention (Griffith, 2006). The scale items in the job satisfaction survey were reworded to military terminology and variables, due to the differences in context between civilian and military organizations. The research tested the significance of the relationship between intent to re-enlist and military based job satisfaction variables, which were operationalized as follows.

1. *Medical Benefits* – the current medical benefits package offered to military service members that serve in the reserve component, provided by TRICARE.
2. *Pay* – money paid to reserve members of the Armed Forces., based on rank, time in the military, and location. For this survey that included all military allowances, such as but not limited to, basic allowance for housing, basic allowance for subsistence, and all special pay or incentives (Army Benefits, Military Benefits, n.d.).
3. *Bonuses* – termed *Selective Retention Bonus* program, it is a cash incentive paid to enlisted members to encourage re-enlistments and retention in critical military skills or to sustain the force readiness through retention (Army Benefits, n.d.).
4. *Distance to Training* – the 2005 Base Closer and Realignment Commission (BRAC) was established as a cost savings measure that closed numerous locations worldwide and consolidated military components and units into combined locations (BRAC, n.d.). For the National Guard and Reserves, this meant closing multiple locations, and consolidation into what is commonly termed *super armories* shared by multiple units. Though cost savings was achieved by reducing the number of buildings and locations to maintain, the impact on soldiers and recruiting was realized by creating large distances between training locations for some service members.
5. *Mobilizations* – the act of assembling a reserve force for active duty for a combat operation in times of war or in support of a national or state emergency.
6. *Communication* – imparting or exchanging of information within the organization, by any means to include but not limited to, phone, social media, mail, and verbal orders.
7. *Nonstandard training* – training events with active duty forces or foreign militaries that offer reserve units the opportunity to exercise the additional skills of planning and transporting large amounts of equipment and personnel that would be required in response to a mobilization or natural disaster, along with the additional cultural training value in cases of overseas training exercise. When these exercises are conducted outside of the US, they are termed overseas deployment training events (ODT). The purpose of overseas deployment training is not only to augment active duty forces in accomplishing the mission but to also allow reserve units and its leaders to *think outside the box* and work through its own strengths and weakness as it deals with the multiple challenges involved in these missions (Duffey, 2007).
8. *Military Training Course* – courses provided for military service member to include those as part of military professional education, additional skills training course based on Military Occupational Skill (MOS), or specialty courses, such as additional skills, that are often used for retention purposes as they help with promotion and personal growth.
9. *Education Benefits* – civilian education benefits provided to reserve service members, and in some cases family members, in the form of the G. I. Bill, Federal Tuition Assistance (TA), and all other forms of provided education benefits for education

Table 1 presents the research questions and hypotheses for the study. The hypotheses were evaluated at an alpha of 0.05.

Table 1: Research Questions and Hypotheses			
R1	What relationship, if any, does pay and allowances have on the intent to reenlist among Reserve or National Guard service members?	H1	There will be a statistically significant relationship between pay and intent to reenlist by Reserve and National Guard service members.
R2	What relationship, if any, do medical benefits have on the intent to reenlist among Reserve or National Guard service members?	H2	There will be a statistically significant relationship between medical benefits and intent to reenlist by Reserve and National Guard service members.
R3	What relationship, if any, does distance to training have on the intent to reenlist among Reserve or National Guard service members?	H3	There will be a statistically significant relationship between distance traveled to training of over 50 miles and intent to reenlist by Reserve and National Guard service members.
R4	What relationship, if any, do bonuses have on the intent to reenlist among Reserve or National Guard service members?	H4	There will be a statistically significant relationship between bonuses and intent to reenlist by Reserve and National Guard service members.
R5	What relationship, if any, do active duty mobilizations have on the intent to reenlist among Reserve or National Guard service members?	H5	There will be a statistically significant relationship between mobilizations and intent to reenlist by Reserve and National Guard service members.
R6	What relationship, if any, does communication have on the intent to reenlist among Reserve or National Guard service members?	H6	There will be a statistically significant relationship between communication and intent to reenlist by Reserve and National Guard service members.
R7	What relationship, if any, do non standard training events outside of normal annual training have on the intent to reenlist among Reserve or National Guard service members?	H7	There will be a statistically significant relationship between non standard training events and intent to reenlist by Reserve and National Guard service members.
R8	What relationship, if any, does education benefits have on the intent to reenlist among Reserve or National Guard service members?	H8	There will be a statistically significant relationship between education benefits and intent to reenlist by Reserve and National Guard service members.
R9	What relationship, if any, does the ability to attend military training courses or schools have on the intent to reenlist among Reserve or National Guard service members?	H9	There will be a statistically significant relationship between attendance in military training courses and intent to reenlist by Reserve and National Guard service members.

Data Collection. A convenience sample of former and current reserve military service members from across the US was conducted during a two-week period. There were 303 surveys collected, and 236 were retained for analysis. Responses with incomplete data or missing responses to the survey questions were discarded, providing a usable response rate of 77.8%. The target population included currently serving Army National Guard military service members located in a southwestern state, without regard to age or current rank. There are currently more than 18,000 soldiers in Army National Guard in this state, and most have access to the Internet to complete an online survey during training events. Though this research was primarily conducted in one single state, it has the largest number of soldiers of any state, and future studies can be replicated for use in other states or components. Though the target population was Army National Guard soldiers, other reserve component members were allowed to complete the survey, as the questions are universal to reserve service members. A six point Likert-type scale was used, and the respondents could use a computer or mobile devices to complete the survey.

Results

Data were analyzed using the Smart PLS software package (Ringle, et al, 2015). PLS was used due to its appropriateness in studies in the exploratory phase, such as the one described in this study. Consistent with prior research, the research model was tested using a two-step process (Hair, et al, 2009). In the first stage, the model was evaluated on the reliability and validity of the constructs. Then the model was evaluated examining predictive relevance of the model, magnitude of effects, and variance explained (Henseler et al., 2009).

Though the sample size had a smaller percentage of females compared to the overall population, the percentage was above average based on the percentage of females in the military reserves (Table 2). There was also a higher percentage of respondents in higher grades (enlisted and officer), and the overall sample consisted of older service members, when compared to the overall population. The higher grade respondents, specifically the larger number of senior officers in compared to the population would have a mediating impact on education level, as the average senior officer is more likely to have a graduate degree, and all officers in senior grades are required to have a Bachelor's degree. The rest of the sample was reasonably in line with the expectations of the population of reserve component service members.

Gender	Female 19.92%	Male 80.08%				
Age	18-21 10.17%	22-25 2.12%	26-31 17.37%	32 or Older 70.34%		
Ethnicity	African American 7.63%	Asian American 1.27%	Native American 4.24%	Hispanic 23.73%	White/Caucasia 59.75%	Other 1.27%
Marital Status	Married 72.88%	Divorced 3.39%	Separated 1.69%	Never Married 22.03%	Widowed 0.00%	
Rank	E1-E4 15.25%	E5-E6 18.64%	E7 or Higher 23.31%	O1-O2 8.47%	O3 11.44%	O4 or Higher 22.88%
Highest Level of Education	High School 8.90%	Some College 35.59%	Bachelor's 27.54%	Some Graduate 9.32%	Graduate Degree 18.64%	

The proposed model had many factors that did not load above the 0.70 threshold, requiring the removal of multiple constructs from the proposed model to include medical benefits, pay, bonus, and military training courses. These variables provided no statistical significance based on the survey responses. Therefore, the model was changed to reflect the relationship with the remaining variables (Figure 2). In the updated model all factor loadings are greater than 0.70, with all entries except four greater than 0.82, which indicates good discriminant validity (Table 3). In addition, the Fornell-Larcker (1981) criterion is satisfied since the square root of AVE (shown on the diagonal of the factor correlations) for each latent variable is greater than that variable with all other latent variables. The Cronbach alphas are all between 0.717 and 0.927, indicating satisfactory internal reliability, and composite reliability values are all larger than 0.80, which indicates satisfactory internal consistency. The average variance explained is greater than 0.604, indicating a good convergent validity, as more than half the variance is explained by the construct (Henseler et al., 2009).

Updated Retention Model

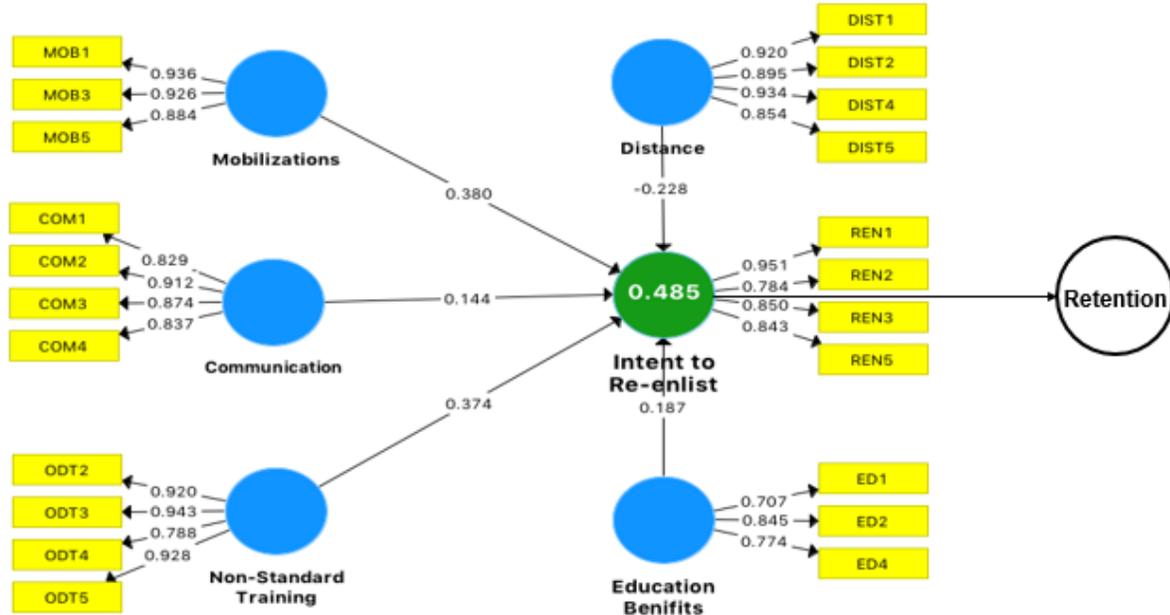


Figure 2. Updated retention model from Smart PLS (Ringle et al., 2015).

Scale Item	Std. Loading	Cronbach Alpha	AVE	Composite Reliability	Factory Correlation					
					COM	DIST	ED	REN	MOB	ODT
COM1	0.829	0.886	0.746	0.921	0.864					
COM2	0.912									
COM3	0.874									
COM4	0.837									
DIST1	0.920	0.927	0.813	0.945	0.248*	0.901				
DIST2	0.895									
DIST4	0.934									
DIST5	0.854									
ED1	0.707	0.714	0.604	0.820	0.245*	0.41*	0.777			
ED2	0.845									
ED3	0.774									
ED4	0.774									
REN1	0.951	0.880	0.738	0.918	0.327*	0.179*	0.437*	0.859		
REN2	0.784									
REN3	0.850									
REN5	0.843									
MOB1	0.936	0.905	0.838	0.940	0.449*	0.547*	0.425*	0.525*	0.916	
MOB3	0.926									
MOB5	0.884									
ODT2	0.920	0.918	0.805	0.942	0.059*	0.231*	0.393*	0.53*	0.334*	0.897
ODT3	0.943									
ODT4	0.788									
ODT5	0.928									

Notes: *Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).
Square root of AVE is shown on the diagonal of the factor correlations.

There was an R^2 of 0.485 (Figure 2), indicating that the variables in the proposed model moderately explain 48.5% of the variance associated with *intent to re-enlist*. Because of the analysis, five of the nine hypotheses were supported. Distance to training, mobilizations, non-

standard training events, communication, and education benefits were supported with a p value < 0.001 (Table 4). Only distance to training had a negative relationship associated with intent to re-enlist, as all other variables displayed a positive relationship with the dependent variable. The inner model suggest that mobilizations (0.380) and non-standard training (0.374) had the strongest effect on the dependent variable, followed by distance to training (-0.228), education benefits (0.187), and communication (0.144) (Figure 2). The hypothesized path relationships between these variables and the dependent variable are statistically significant, and indicate moderately strong predictors of *intent to re-enlist* (Wong, 2013).

Hypothesis			Path Coefficient	P Value
H1	Medical benefits have an effect on itent to re-enlist.	not supported		
H2	Pay has an effect on intent to re-enlist.	not supported		
H3	Bonuses have an effect on intent to re-enlist.	not supported		
H4	Distance to training has an effect on intent to re-enlist.	supported	-0.228	<0.001
H5	Mobilizations have an effect on intent to re-enlist.	supported	0.380	<0.001
H6	Non-standard training events have an effect on intent to re-enlist.	supported	0.374	<0.001
H7	Communication has an effect on intent to re-enlist.	supported	0.144	<0.001
H8	Military training courses have an effect on intent to re-enlist.	not supported		
H9	Education benefits have an effect on intent to re-enlist.	supported	0.187	<0.001

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine which variables of job satisfaction, if any, had the greatest impact on the *intent to re-enlist* among military reserve service members. The results of the analysis revealed a clear notable effect of some of the factors on the *intent to re-enlist* of reserve component service members, such as distance to training events, mobilizations, non-standard training events, communication and education benefits. These factors were shown to explain 48.5% of the total variance with intent to re-enlist, with a 99% or greater confidence level. Within the proposed model, based on Alderfer's theory, the relatedness group had the strongest effect on *intent to re-enlist*, with mobilizations and non-standard training displaying the greatest path coefficients of the variables (Table 4).

The first four hypotheses were based on the existence needs of the respondents based on the model, and H1-H3, did not support a significant relationship with intent to re-enlist (see Figure 1). The only variable supported was the distance to training events, which demonstrated a negative relationship with the dependent variable. This indicates that a greater distance to required training events negatively influences the *intent to re-enlist*. The lack of significant relationship with this group, except for distance to training events, is not constant with prior studies. Most previous studies focused on full time employment, whereas reserve military service is part-time for the majority of its members. The survey respondents were also older with higher levels of education in comparison to the population, which likely relates to higher earning potential in civilian employment that meets the existence needs. Out of the growth needs of the model, made up of military training courses and education benefits, only education benefits supported a significant relationship with intent to re-enlist. Consistent with prior studies on US military organizations, H9 indicates a strong relationship between education benefits and military service.

The primary goal of this study was to determine if the proposed job satisfaction variables

had an effect on intent to re-enlist by service members, which would support increased retention of reserve component forces. The current research presented a proposed model, which incorporated features of job satisfaction identified in the literature, modified specifically for reserve service members, and applied these variables to intent to re-enlist. The major contribution to this study is the amount of variance associated with the relatedness group of constructs observed in H5-H7, which supports a strong relationship between mobilizations, communication, and non-standard training events with intent to re-enlist. H5 and H6 posit that key antecedents to job satisfaction for reserve members are mobilizations and non-standard training events, such as overseas deployment training. The study found that reserve service members who take part in these types of events are more likely to re-enlist, indicating that participation in these events could improve military reserve retention.

Limitations and Future Research

Although many of the proposed relationships were validated and significant, the level of R^2 indicates there are other variables that may influence the study's findings. The development of more complex models, or models that introduce additional variables could more robustly explain intent to re-enlist and overall reserve service member retention. Additionally, the study surveyed service members from a southwestern section of the U.S, and the demographic data may not be reflective of the entire US as a whole, or other specific states. Populations with significantly different demographic profiles might witness potential results that differ substantially from the overall population. Specifically the higher percentage of senior officers and enlisted service members could indicate different responses from the overall population.

This study of the impact of job satisfaction on the intent to re-enlist and overall retention is useful information for practitioners, policy makers, and future researchers. Military commanders, human resource officers, and non-commissioned officers at all levels of military organizations are the practitioners that are responsible for personnel readiness and retention in military organizations. This study offers insight into the types of constructs and tools they might utilize to increase retention and enlistments. Identifying ways to increase retention may also have long-term cost savings from reduction in funding of recruiting, training of new soldiers, and additional equipment costs. Future researchers also benefit from this study, as they can take these variables, replicate this study to other states, or reserve components organizations to identify trends that are universal in the US, or even in other countries with similar challenges. Retention is not just a military problem, and researchers could compare this study with those in other sectors that experience turnover, to include part-time labor or other contract employment in the defense industry or other business organizations.

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