

QUANTIFYING AUTHORITY: EXPLORING EMBODIED AUTHORITY AMONG INDIAN ARMY OFFICERS' WIVES

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Introduction

The traditional role of wives, historically confined to household responsibilities and family upbringing, has undergone transformative shifts, particularly in the Indian army settings. The colonial era witnessed the emergence of wives who, while tethered to their spouse's rank, wielded autonomous authority, often exerting imperial power over indigenous populations. This phenomenon, exemplified by the wives of colonial military personnel stationed in India, has been documented as a form of exercised authority with potentially violent consequences on the native communities (McInnis, 2014). Likewise, portraying authority extends beyond formal designations, encompassing these wives' influence and impact within the army community.

In the context of this research paper, authority is defined as the capacity of Indian army officer's wives to actively navigate a complex domain of responsibilities, expectations, and opportunities intricately linked to their spouse's army rank. The concept of embodied authority is introduced, emphasizing that authority emanates from these wives' physical presence, actions, and demeanor. This study recognizes that the wives, particularly those of officer rank, contribute significantly to the organization's leadership and influence. Empowerment, within the framework of this research, refers to the sense of self-determination and capability experienced by army wives stemming from their affiliation and active engagement in organizational welfare activities.

Contrary to these historical instances, contemporary portrayals of wives within the Indian army, mainly through multimedia, often cast them as passive and vulnerable individuals patiently awaiting the return of their spouses from distant deployment (Sapra, 2021). This prevalent stereotype obscures a more nuanced reality, where wives in the Indian army, particularly those from the officer rank, navigate a complex landscape of responsibilities, demeanor, expectations, and opportunities linked to their spouse's rank (Drummet et al., 2003; Goldfein et al., 2020; Pandey, 2021). Likewise, as stated, "military wives informally carry the rank of their spouse" (Drummet et al., 2003, p. 279).

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While it is undeniable that the inherent demands and challenges of the spouse's military profession impact the wives, it is equally important to acknowledge the authority and empowerment that this affiliation bestows upon them. In particular, this research focuses on the wives of officer-rank personnel who, due to their spouse's rank, are obligated to partake in organizational welfare activities, social gatherings, hosting events, and participating in welfare meetings. Additionally, they bear responsibilities equivalent to spouses, all without compensation. Moreover, army wives display remarkable adaptability to the challenges posed by their spouse's profession.

Rather than succumbing to the difficulties, they proactively engage in personal growth, forging new social connections, acquiring new skills, and maintaining stable employment (Dandekar et al., 2006; McMurray, 2016; Nimbalkar, 2013). Nevertheless, the media persistently depicts these wives, who serve as the backbone of these organizations, in a manner that portrays them as weak, shaping the societal perspective. However, the study delves deeper into an underexplored facet: Does the spouse rank in the Indian army confer embodied authority upon the wives?

The extant literature, primarily from European and American sources, has predominantly focused on the psychological impacts of deployment separation on army wives' mental health and well-being (Rosen et al., 1994; Wood et al., 1995). The question of embodied authority providing empowerment, however, remains largely unexplored. Furthermore, there is a noticeable dearth of research within the Indian context, making this study both timely and crucial for a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted roles and experiences of army wives in the Indian socio-cultural milieu.

METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

Study Problem and Objectives: The study delved into the perspective of army wives regarding their perceived embodiment of authority associated with their spouses in the Indian army. The primary objective was to assess army wives' perceptions and acceptance of the authority assigned to their spouses, with a particular focus on comprehending the dynamics of empowerment in play. The overarching goal was to challenge existing misconceptions and present a novel viewpoint on the role of wives in formal army organizations, establishing the groundwork for future research in this area.

Research Design and Sampling: The investigation employed a quantitative research design, utilizing an online Google survey form to collect data. The focus group consisted of wives of army officers within the Indian army. Convenience sampling was utilized to ensure a readily available and accessible pool of participants, promoting diverse representation across various ranks, ages, and service durations. Similarly, the survey form was distributed

within the existing WhatsApp group, which comprised approximately 300-500 participants.

The use of convenience sampling was primarily driven by the study's population, which aimed to include wives of serving personnel constrained by professional obligations for participation. This approach aimed to minimize potential harm and hesitation by facilitating the involvement of interested individuals, ensuring anonymity, and preventing any influence on voluntary participation. This design and sampling method was chosen to gain preliminary insights while addressing the unique challenges posed by the study population's professional obligations.

Survey instrument: A meticulously structured online Google survey featuring Likert-type questions was developed to assess participants' perceptions of embodied authority quantitatively. The Likert scale ranges from 1 to 5, with one signifying "Strongly Disagree" and five indicating "Strongly Agree". Likert-style survey questions: -

" To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement: "The designation of my spouse in the Indian army provides a sense of authority and empowerment?"

" To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement: "Assuming the authority designated to my spouse positively impacts my authority and empowerment"?"

" Please rate your agreement or disagreement with the statement: "I actively seek support or resources to navigate the responsibilities of embodying my spouse's authority."

" I feel empowered and autonomous as an army wife.

Survey distribution and Sample size: The survey was distributed electronically through the instant messaging app 'WhatsApp,' ensuring accessibility for participants. Clear instructions on the purpose of the study, data application, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and potential harm were provided. The sample size was determined to ensure statistical robustness, with the voluntary involvement facilitating meaningful data analysis. Furthermore, the inclusion criteria encompassed army wives, both serving and retired. Conversely, data acquired from 61 participants the total sample size was reduced to 31 by excluding the male responses.

Additionally, this study focused on army wives in the age range of 25-54 and older. The majority, 45%, of participants fell within the 45-54 age bracket, while the lowest number of participants, 6%, belonged to the 25-34 age group. Similarly, the study observed the highest representation among individuals holding the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, 48%, with the lowest 3% representation found among those with the rank of Brigadier. Moreover, the study noted the highest representation, 87%, from wives of serving personnel. At the same time, the lowest 3% representation was identified among individuals currently serving and

also the spouses of Indian Army personnel.

Data analysis, validity, and reliability: Numerical values were assigned in Excel to represent "Strongly Disagree," "Disagree," "Neutral," "Agree," and "Strongly Agree." The quantitative data was then analyzed rigorously through descriptive statistics and inferential analysis.

Limitations: Recognized limitations in this study may include the potential for self-reporting bias due to the reliance on survey responses and the online nature of data collection, which may impact the study's generalizability (Winton & Sabol, 2022). These limitations are openly acknowledged and thoughtfully considered when interpreting the results. Moreover, given the formal and distinctive organizational context of the Indian army, the hesitation in representation is duly acknowledged and considered. Hence, online surveys and convenience sampling were used. Additionally, it is imperative to note that this exploratory study features a relatively small sample size, as it represents a singular effort by the researcher, limited by both time and resources.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This research, involving the armed forces community, demands heightened ethical sensitivity. Principles such as respect for persons, beneficence, and justice, inherent in human participant research, guided the study's design and execution. Given the unique stressors experienced by the army community, the researcher prioritized protecting participant's privacy, respecting their time and perspectives, and avoiding potential harm. Additional considerations include navigating issues of informed consent, confidentiality, and data protection within a community characterized by distinct hierarchies and codes of conduct.

Emphasis was placed on voluntary participation, ensuring no coercion or perceived pressure. Anonymity and data security were paramount, given the sensitivity and security of the army community. The online survey was designed to minimize potential risks, avoiding topics that may trigger difficult memories or emotions. Participants were assured that their welfare was the priority. Findings are reported transparently and translated into actionable insights without compromising the confidentiality of participants.

Ethical Safeguards: -

Voluntary participation: Participants were informed that involvement is voluntary, with no justifications or pressure posed for withdrawal. The survey form was shared within a WhatsApp group, accompanied by a concise explanation of its contents. Participants were invited to join the survey after understanding its details. Notably, the form was not

individually distributed, reflecting a commitment to upholding justice and participation of their own accord; rather, it was accessible to the collective group members, which ranged from 300 to 500 individuals. Despite this broad dissemination, 61 participants engaged in the survey.

Informed consent: Clear disclosure of the study's purpose, potential advantages or disadvantages for participation, and other relevant details ensured informed consent. A formal consent form was attached along with the online survey. A statement in bold indicated that completing the survey implies consent, as it did not request names and record email IDs to maintain anonymity.

Anonymity and confidentiality: Strict protocols were used to maintain anonymity; hence, only necessary demographic data was collected. In the demographic data, due to security considerations, information regarding location was omitted. However, data on service duration, education, age, gender, occupation, marital status, and army affiliation was gathered.

Risk of harm: Every effort was made to minimize harm, and precautions were taken to avoid adverse data storage and handling outcomes. The data was stored in the researcher's Google Drive, with access restricted solely to the researcher.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The study aimed to quantify the extent to which army wives perceive and embody the authority associated with their spouse's designation in the Indian army. The survey commenced with demographic questions and initiated with the query: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement: 'The designation of my spouse in the Indian army provides a sense of authority and empowerment'?" This sought to determine if the spouse's army designation as in the rank imparts a feeling of authority and empowerment to the wives, with respondents using a Likert scale.

Out of the 31 participants, the survey results indicated that 64.5% of the majority agreed with the statement, with approximately 16 selecting "Agree" and four choosing "Strongly Agree." Conversely, 22.5% of seven respondents remained neutral, while one selected "Strongly Disagree" and 3 chose "Disagree". The calculated mean was 3.6, representing the average response. The median, the middle point of the responses, was 4. Additionally, the mode indicating the most frequently occurring response was 4 respectively. The mode was calculated as Mode single and Mode multiple, yielding the exact value.

The subsequent inquiry explored the impact of spouse's designation on the authority and empowerment of army wives: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the

statement: 'Assuming the authority designated to my spouse positively impacts my authority and empowerment.'" Likewise, as depicted in the literature, army wives often identify themselves as integral members of the army. Over the course of their service tenure, they become accustomed to and unilaterally embrace the organization, embodying its ethos, which is further facilitated by spouse designation (Baker, 2005; Goldfein et al., 2020).

Among the 31 participants, a majority of 80.6% agreed with the statement, with approximately 17 respondents selecting "Agree" and eight choosing "Strongly Agree." Additionally, 3 participants took a "Neutral" stance, while two strongly disagreed and one disagreed. The calculated mean, representing the average response, remained consistent at 3.6. Similarly, the median, indicating the midpoint of the response, and the mode, denoting the most frequently occurring response, were both unchanged at 4. The mode was determined as Mode single and Mode multiple, yielding the exact value in both cases.

The following question inquired, "Please rate your agreement or disagreement with the statement: 'I actively seek support or resources to navigate the responsibilities of embodying my spouse's authority.'" This question assessed the proactive approach of army wives in seeking support or resources while assuming their spouse's authority, indicating their level of engagement with the Indian army organization, participation, and understanding of the authority they independently hold. As highlighted by McMurray, over time, army wives have portrayed their roles not merely as dependents legally labeled but rather as interdependent partners (McMurray, 2016).

Among the 31 participants, 54.8% agreed with the statement, with approximately 12 choosing "Agree" and five opting for "Strongly Agree." Additionally, 22.5%, a notable number of seven, took a "Neutral" stance, with 1 participant strongly disagreeing and six disagreeing. However, there was a shift in the calculated mean, representing the average response, which increased to 4.1. Despite this change, the median, indicating the midpoint of the responses, and the mode, denoting the most frequently occurring response, remained consistent at 4. The mode was determined as Mode single and Mode multiple, yielding the exact value.

The final inquiry was, 'I feel empowered and autonomous as an army wife.' This statement delved into the self-perceived empowerment and authority of army wives. Moreover, in connection with the literature, army personnel seek wives with similar educational backgrounds, a phenomenon known as educational assortative mating. This choice is driven by the understanding that wives are traditionally expected not only to support the organization but also to contribute to community welfare and the professional advancement of their spouses. Consequently, wives appear to undergo experiential learning to embody

the authority expected of them in their roles effectively (Ott et al., n.d.).

Among the 31 participants, 83.8% of a majority expressed agreement with the statement, with approximately 14 selecting "Agree" and 12 choosing "Strongly Agree". Only 2 participants opted for a "Neutral" or "Disagree" stance, with one participant strongly disagreeing. However, there was a shift in the calculated mean again, representing the average response, which decreased to 3.9. Despite this change, the median, indicating the midpoint of the responses, and the mode, denoting the most frequently occurring response, remained consistent at four. The mode was determined as Mode Single and Mode Multiple, yielding the exact value of 4 in both cases.

Moreover, the lowest mean values were observed among the Colonel, Brigadier, and Major ranks when examining values across all four questions and analyzing the participants' responses. In contrast, the highest mean values were noted in the responses of Lieutenant Colonel and Colonel participants. In addition, when considering the collective median of responses to all four questions, a consistent pattern emerges akin to the mean analysis. The lowest median values were evident among the Colonel, Brigadier, and Major ranks. This is in contrast to the median values observed in the responses of Colonel and Lieutenant Colonel, who represented the major proportion in the sample.

Furthermore, when examining the collective mode of responses to the four questions, the lowest values were consistently found among the Major, Colonel, and Brigadier rank. Conversely, the highest values were consistently observed in the responses of Lieutenant Colonel and Colonel ranks. Furthermore, the degree of variability or spread within the responses for each of the four statements was quantified as follows: 0.95 for the first question, 1.03 for the second, 1.01 for the third, and 1.04 for the fourth. Similarly, the standard deviation of individual participant responses ranged from a minimum of 0.0 to a maximum of 1.5.

Moreover, correlation testing assesses the extent to which two variables are interrelated or exhibit concurrent movement. The results typically indicated a predominantly positive correlation between variables related to spousal designation, authority enablement, positive connection with authoritative positions, and resource utilization. Higher correlation coefficients signified a stronger positive relationship between these variables, contributing to an enhanced sense of empowerment among army wives. Similarly, the Lieutenant Colonel's rank among wives consistently exhibited notably high values for mean, median, mode, and correlation tests.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored how army wives perceive embodied authority in relation to their

spouse's rank in the Indian army. The majority of participants expressed a sense of authority and empowerment associated with their spouse's army position, aligning with the view of themselves as integral active members of the army community. Analysis of specific statements related to authority, empowerment, seeking support, and autonomy revealed consistent patterns, indicating a general agreement among participants.

However, there were slight fluctuations in mean values, particularly among participants with ranks such as Brigadier, Colonel, and Major, who consistently reported the lowest mean values compared to Lieutenant Colonel and Colonel participants. This suggests potential variations in the perception and embodiment of authority based on the spouse's army rank. Nevertheless, correlation testing highlighted a predominantly positive relationship between variables related to spousal designation, authority enablement, positive connection with authoritative positions, and resource utilization.

Higher correlation coefficients suggested that as wives embodied authority increased, so did the sense of empowerment. However, it's essential to acknowledge the study's limitations, particularly the smaller representation of participants of Major and Brigadier ranks, warranting further exploration into their perspectives. Based on these findings, several recommendations emerge. Leveraging authorized social media channels can highlight army wives' contributions, dispelling misconceptions and fostering understanding. Recognizing technology as inherently gender-neutral can enhance awareness of roles and responsibilities, thereby diminishing assumptions and fostering inclusivity.

Moreover, increased awareness may encourage a more proactive stance in seeking support and resources. Fostering positive connections among army wives within the organization can enhance and contribute to an overall sense of empowerment and reshape media portrayals, moving away from stereotypes. For instance, contrasting portrayals in media productions like 'Border,' 'RRR,' 'Gunjan Saxena: The Kargil Girl,' and 'Rakshak India's Braves' highlight the need for more accurate representations of army wives' experiences. Overall, this study provides valuable insights into authority perception and empowerment dynamics among Indian army wives.

The provided recommendations aim to foster a supportive environment that enables army wives to navigate their roles effectively within society. Additionally, they prompt media to present experiences in an empirical manner and facilitate research in the field. Continued evaluation of support programs is crucial to ensuring the empowerment of army wives, challenging passive stereotypes, and reinforcing their proactive contributions to the organization. Thus, it is imperative to depart from the notion that army wives are inactive bystanders and recognize their proactive role in fortifying the organization.

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