

THE UNIQUE ROLE OF CIA WIVES

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CIA MISSION

Dependent CIA spouses may spend many years supporting the CIA mission, in this country and abroad. Without pay, many of these women serve loyally (to date, most dependent spouses are women) in a succession of overseas assignments, interspersed by longer or shorter tours stateside, through as many as 20 to 40 years of married life.

These dependents work hard in foreign countries to establish environments in which operations can be expeditiously and effectively conducted. They cooperate loyally in security requirements, ensuring the cooperation of household members. They guard the health and, in many cases, the morale of the staff officers to whom they are married. They fulfill the many duties required by their spouses' cover assignments--tasks that can and frequently do add up to more than a 40-hour week. In many cases, CIA dependents provide clerical and operational support--usually unpaid--with such efficiency that personnel requirements abroad are kept to a minimum. At small posts, they provide a reservoir of cleared personnel that would not otherwise be available.

For their CIA-employed spouse, they provide extra contacts with the local scene. As they work to establish and maintain new homes, they learn the local mores--knowledge of which can help to expedite the employee's operational activities. The CIA wives help to build working relationships with the local citizens and third-country nations in whom their spouses are interested. The friendships they make with local wives translate into freer communication by CIA personnel with their local male contacts.

SPECIAL HARDSHIPS FACED BY CIA WIVES

Spouses of CIA personnel may face unique risks of divorce and resulting financial insecurity. An argument can be made that marriages to CIA staff members founder because job-related secrecy leads to breakdowns in communication between husband and wife, and subsequent estrangement. The use of alcohol for official purposes can lead to abuse, spurred by the stresses of years of constant change, of hazardous operational assignments, of the need to keep family and friends at a distance--territorially and informationally.

Both marriage partners face stresses unique to CIA service of learning and fulfilling new roles with changing cover assignments. Abroad, a CIA employee can expect to handle two jobs--with substantial training only for his assignment as an intelligence officer. His spouse finds that not only must she move her entire household frequently, but that she, too, must learn and discharge a double set of duties, including many completely new tasks, with each new tour and country.

Often the countries of interest to intelligence professionals are the countries in turmoil--small, backward countries attempting too-rapid entry into the modern world. As a result, the CIA wife frequently finds herself at small stations that can mean difficult--even hazardous--living for American families. Her spouse can be away for long periods of time on unknown, possibly dangerous, assignments. Fearful for her husband's and her family's safety, she must cope alone with family problems, many of which she is encountering for the first time. Often, she is outside the official, diplomatic family. Even if they are available, she may be unable to use peer or official support systems because of the requirements for secrecy.

Like other Foreign Service dependents, the CIA spouse generally finds that she cannot maintain a career of her own, because the laws of the host countries prohibit placing foreigners in jobs that can be held by local citizens. The CIA dependent can discover also that the frequent moves--often to less developed countries--eliminate any chance of developing or maintaining professional expertise. She generally is instructed that security requirements and cover assignments prohibit any outside employment.

THE STATESIDE EXPERIENCE FOR CIA WIVES

The CIA spouse finds her financial security threatened when returning to a stateside divorce court, she is handicapped by the CIA rules for secrecy in telling details of why a divorce has become necessary. She cannot describe the stresses of her participation in overseas assignments, of the extra obligations of cover and security, or of family-debilitating problems, such as alcoholism. She is loyal and trained to be discreet, and she knows that the family income is unprotected by Civil Service regulations, should she breach security requirements. Some wives have been left to fend for themselves--without any financial support--because the real problems with the marriage could not be brought out in court.

Once divorced, the former CIA spouse often finds that she must care for her children alone, as her former husband departs again for foreign assignment. The problems she encounters with her growing youngsters may have been made more difficult by damage to parent-child relationships, caused by the required secrecy concerning the father's role abroad, as well as his frequent, long and unexplained absences from the home.

FINANCIAL HARDSHIPS FOR DIVORCED CIA SPOUSES

The divorced spouse must cope with increased expenses--the result of inflation, the lack of cost-of-living allowances, and the withdrawal of medical coverage--at the time her share of the family income has been drastically reduced. This, despite the fact that her own and her children's ills--physical and emotional--were aggravated or incurred abroad.

If the divorced spouse attempts to enter the job market, she may find her age and lack of marketable skills handicapping. Any training she once had may be many years outdated. She has no record of employment. She probably is too old for the training programs that offer upward career mobility.

Her years of service to her country earn her no special consideration for government employment. If she is fortunate enough to secure an entry-level government job, her job placement probably will be too low, her years of working may be too few, to earn even a subsistence-level retirement. Implementation of the proposed delays and limitations in government-related retirement benefits can be expected only to further diminish her chances of earning by herself an adequate retirement income.