

Spouse Has Most to Lose if Colonel is Found Guilty, She Says

If Col. James H. Johnson is convicted of the charges against him, sentences under military law can include a dishonorable discharge, forfeiture of all pay and allowances, and confinement for five years.

But the future is also uncertain for Johnson's family. If he loses his benefits, so would they.

His wife, Kristina Johnson, said she felt it was right to tell officials about his alleged activities. She told Army Times she finds it unfair there is no whistle-blower protection that would safeguard her husband's pay and benefits for her and their children.

"I am the one who blew the whistle on this, and yet I stand to lose everything," she said. "Is that the way we take care of Army families? I've done nothing but cooperate with Army investigators."

If he were to retire, she said, she would be eligible for his benefits and half of his pay. Now, she said she worries whether her children will remain eligible for health insurance and college tuition assistance under the GI Bill.

In the military justice system, only domestic violence victims are entitled to retain benefits after their spouses are convicted, but no such provisions are made when spouses are turned in for adultery, said attorney Greg Rinckey.

Rinckey, a former Army attorney whose Albany, N.Y., law firm often represents soldiers and veterans, is not connected with the Johnson case, but he said the case touches on a broader paradox in the military justice system.

Spouses have a disincentive to report wrongdoing because to do so can take money out of their pockets.

"I'm sure there are women who have known that their husbands have done something immoral or illegal and have just kept their mouths shut," Mrs. Johnson said. "There's no protection for spouses."