



2014

MILITARY FAMILY LIFESTYLE SURVEY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



IN COLLABORATION WITH



The 2014 Blue Star Families Annual Lifestyle Survey was written and analyzed in collaboration with the IVMF.

Funding for the Military Family Lifestyle Survey provided through the generosity of our presenting sponsor USAA and from Health Net Federal Services, UnitedHealthcare, JPMorgan Chase, and Facebook.

About

BLUE STAR FAMILIES

Blue Star Families was formed in April 2009 by a group of military spouses to create a platform where military family members could join with civilian communities and leaders to address the challenges of military life. Blue Star Families includes active duty, National Guard, Reserve, wounded, transitioning service members and their families from all ranks and services, as well as veterans and civilians who strongly support them.

Blue Star Families is nearly 100,000 strong. We are committed to connecting with one another through the unique challenges of military service and asking the larger civilian population to help as well, strengthening military families regardless of rank, branch of service or physical location.

THE INSTITUTE FOR VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES (IVMF)

The IVMF is the first interdisciplinary national institute in higher education focused on the social, economic, education and policy issues impacting veterans and their families post-service. Through our focus on veteran-facing programming, research and policy, employment and employer support, and community engagement, the institute provides in-depth analysis of the challenges facing the veteran community, captures best practices and serves as a forum to facilitate new partnerships and strong relationships between the individuals and organizations committed to making a difference for veterans and military families.

Forward • ★ • ★ • ★ • ★ • ★ •

While many military families are struggling to make meaning of the past 13 years, others are re-enlisting or enlisting for the first time, joining a life of service unfamiliar to most of this nation. As the military downsizes, the past year has touched military families, and has shown that uncertainty is the one constant in the military lifestyle; in fact, uncertainty in military life is noted in this year's survey as one of the top five issues for the military community. The all-volunteer force will continue to be tested. Understanding why people choose to serve, why they stay in the military, and how they can successfully transition as veterans is essential to ensuring the sustainability of voluntary military service. The way we treat our military, veterans, and transitioning service members will impact whether or not the volunteer force is a sustainable and viable option going forward.

As much as there has been uncertainty, there also has been much progress. This year, states across the country have passed legislation that enable reciprocity for licensed professionals as they move across state lines thus supporting military spouse employment. More companies are recognizing the value not only of hiring veterans, but also the significant value that military spouses bring to the workplace. Universities and college campuses are acknowledging the value of veterans and military family members on their campuses and schools are increasingly becoming aware of the needs of military children in their classrooms.

Philanthropists and corporate partners have pledged donations on behalf of veterans and military families demonstrating the benefit of collaboration and collective impact. Yet, as the government tightens its budget this type of collaboration is not only beneficial but necessary to ensure that the nation continues to care for those who have served and their families. We thank Blue Star Families, the Institute of Veterans and Military Families and all the partnering organizations who help distribute the survey to its members. Without the significant participation by so many in our military community the results and recommendations would not be possible. We encourage you to use the findings within this report to generate creative solutions, innovative partnerships, and long-standing collaborations that will augment and support the work already being done on behalf of the military community. While much progress has been made, we hope these results will inspire you to find new ways to make a difference to the military families, service members, and veterans you touch.



Deanie Dempsey
Blue Star Spouse and Mom



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*Blue Star Families, Department of Research and Policy. (September, 2014)
2014 Military Family Lifestyle Survey: Findings and Analysis. Washington, D.C.*

Blue Star Families is a national, nonprofit network of military families from all ranks and services, including Guard and Reserve, dedicated to strengthening, connecting and leading military families. Together with our partners, Blue Star Families hosts a robust array of morale and empowerment programs, including Blue Star Careers, Blue Star Museums, Books on Bases, Operation Appreciation, and Operation Honor Corp.

Blue Star Families works directly with the Department of Defense (DoD) and senior members of local, state and federal government to bring the most important military family issues to light. Working in concert with fellow nonprofits, community advocates, and public officials, Blue Star Families raises awareness of the challenges and strengths of military family life.

To learn more about Blue Star Families, visit www.bluestarfam.org or join us on Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest.

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Introduction · ★ · ★ · ★ · ★ · ★ · ★ ·

This past year has been remarkable for military families. The nation's security remains dependent on an all-volunteer force. After nearly 13 years of continuous war, the military has both reduced its long-standing presence in Afghanistan and is simultaneously downsizing overall. Yet, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have not ended, new conflicts elsewhere continue to emerge, and service members are deployed across the globe.

The nature of the military, its size, the expectation of volunteer service, the exposure to danger, and the lifestyle itself each, in some way, separate military from civilian life.

“Inside [installations], troops and their families live and work on massive military bases, separated geographically, socially and economically from the society they serve. Outside, Americans live and work, largely unaware of the service and sacrifice of the 2.4 million active and reserve troops.”¹

If volunteer military service is to be sustainable, the opportunity cost spent serving the country must be understood, viewed as worthwhile, and supported through appropriate policies, services, and legislation. Active duty service members inevitably transition from military service and the way in which they transition into civilian life has ramifications. The importance of narrowing this gap between the military and civilian communities, sometimes referred to as the military-civilian divide, will help ease military members' and their families' time in service as well as their eventual transition into the civilian sector. Transition from service also presents opportunities for tangible examples of support from the civilian community to show service members, veterans, and their families that their time in the military has been worthwhile and that their military service is not viewed a liability, weakness, or otherwise undesirable option by the non-military public. The first step in recognizing the specific and substantial contributions military families make to this nation's security

and collective strength is to understand their perspectives and experiences while serving, as they transition from service, as well as their experiences once they become veterans.

Toward this end, each year, Blue Star Families (BSF) with help from its valued partners, conducts a survey, collects data, and disseminates the results with the objective of providing stakeholders a timely and relevant perspective, highlighting the top issues facing military families and providing concrete recommendations. With this information, stakeholders may be better able to target their efforts to minimize redundancy, improve outcomes, and to generate effective programs and actionable plans to solve problems, improve services, and minimize gaps. Many positive changes have occurred since this survey was launched five year ago; there have been multiple new partnerships across public, private, and nonprofit sectors. The nation has made progress in recognizing and hiring service members, veterans, and military spouses. All 50 states have recognized the Military Child Interstate Compact,



and the needs of military caregivers have received national attention and resources through successful grassroots efforts and research. These issues and others have been highlighted in past surveys. BSF is proud to be a leader in those efforts.

This report summarizes the results and analysis of the fifth annual Blue Star Families' Military Family Lifestyle Survey (a detailed comprehensive report is available on the BSF website at www.bluestarfam.org.) The survey, for the first time this year, was conducted in collaboration with the Institute of Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) at Syracuse University. The survey, updated and administered annually since 2009, provides valuable insights for policy makers, military leadership, government decision-makers, and the general public on the challenges and stressors impacting contemporary military families.

Each year, the survey identifies the top issues of concern and this year, for the first time, the issues were compared across various subgroups active duty spouses, veterans, and active duty service members. A number of new items also were added to this year's survey.

Specific items were included to gain insight on the impact of sequestration and budget cuts. New questions also were added to address veterans' transition, education, and use of resources. Respondents also were asked to assess a variety of community based resources. Finally, using standardized measures, additional mental health questions were added to gather information about depression, substance abuse, and stress. It is notable that, increasingly, there are more researchers across the country studying military families and various aspects of military life. Only in the past five to seven years has such substantial research been conducted. Research now shows what military families have always known to be true: that military families are an important part of readiness, retention, and recruitment.

Conducted online in February 2014



“Inside [installations], troops and their families live and work on massive military bases, separated geographically, socially and economically from the society they serve. Outside, Americans live and work, largely unaware of the service and sacrifice of the 2.4 million active and reserve troops.”¹

with more than 6,200 military family respondents, this survey was designed to reveal significant trends among contemporary military families by examining key areas, including stressors, use and confidence in services, and the importance of various aspects of pay and benefits. The results provide a useful snapshot, garnering insight into the unique lifestyles of modern-day military families as they downsize after nearly 13 years of continuous war.

At the time the survey was administered, the impact of sequestration, potential budget

cuts, and active discussion about changes to pay and benefits were ongoing. The events at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) had not come to light publicly.² Currently, federal resources are diminishing while the military is downsizing and military families are moving into civilian communities and necessarily seeking civilian employment. The most recent demographic report issued by the Department of Defense (DoD) indicates that 27% of all military separations are now involuntary.³ These events are occurring simultaneously and will require that tough decisions be made. Military families need transparent dissemination of information to make thoughtful and proactive decisions. Within communities, strategic allocation of resources, creative collaboration, and increased partnerships between the public, private, and nonprofit sector will be necessary to meet the needs for services once provided by the DoD and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Our hope is that the results of this survey will provide useful information to decision makers examining these issues and others.

Partner Acknowledgements · ★ · ★ · ★ · ★ · ★ · ★ ·

The widespread distribution of this survey through partner organizations and others in the military community greatly contributed to the high level of response and helped achieve a comprehensive and diverse sample of military personnel across all branches and services, geographies, ethnicities, and military experiences.

Blue Star Families (BSF) and the IVMF were honored to have the assistance of the following partner organizations for this year's survey:



Methodology · ★ · ★ · ★ · ★ · ★ ·

This is the fifth iteration of the BSF Military Family Lifestyle Survey conducted each year since 2009. The 2014 survey was designed by BSF in collaboration with the IVMF and was analyzed with extensive input from military family members and advocates, subject matter experts, and policymakers who work with military families. The survey results are intended to

- (1) facilitate a holistic understanding of the experiences of service members, veterans, and military families so that communities, legislators, and policymakers can better serve each of their unique needs and
- (2) identify the key aspects of military life to effectively target resources, services, and programs in order to support the sustainability of military service.

BSF and the IVMF worked together with other national military community organizations that distributed the survey to their own constituents and communities. Possible biases, introduced through the utilization of a non-probability sampling method, include over- or under-representation, which means that this sample cannot necessarily be considered a direct representation of the entire military family population. Nevertheless, this survey's breakdown of the active duty force, age, and geographical location are comparable to actual representation of the military community when compared to the DoD 2012 Demographic Report.⁴

The survey was conducted online with approval from the Syracuse University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and was administered online using Qualtrics survey system (Qualtrics, Inc., Provo, UT), generating a self-selected, convenience sample. Of the 6,270 military family members who started the survey, 53% (3,328) completed the entire questionnaire (there were 26 topical sections and 383 possible questions in total). The number of respondents varies per question based on applicability to the respondent (for example,



relationship to the service member, presence of children, employment status). The survey was accessible online from February 15th to March 15th 2014. Survey recruitment and outreach was broad and included direct e-mail distribution from the BSF and IVMF mailing lists and social media dissemination (e.g., via Facebook, Twitter, organizational newsletters, and via blog postings across partner websites) to nonprofit, supportive service organizations, and professional organizations. Recruitment and outreach was designed in a way that systemically solicited from sample subsets of the military family population. All survey participation was considered voluntary and no identifying information was collected or linked to answers on the survey.

Many sections of this survey were only available for completion by specific subgroups: military spouses, veterans, or service member respondents. A survey branching technique was used whereby the answers to certain questions were a gateway to specific follow-on questions (detailed branching is available upon request). For example, sections on children's deployment experiences, military child education, the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) schools, Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP), and child care

were seen only by respondents who indicated they had children under the age of 18. Likewise, spousal relationship questions were seen only by married respondents, resources for parents of service member were only seen by those that indicate they were parents, and questions specifically focused on veterans were only seen by those that indicated they were veterans. Deployment stress, mental health issues, suicide prevention, spouse employment, and financial literacy were seen by service members and their spouses, whether or not they had children. Survey questions about the most important military life and national issues, services for military families, social media use, civic engagement, and public policy were available to all survey respondents, which included service members, spouses, parents, children, siblings, and girlfriend and boyfriends.

The majority of survey questions were optional. They allowed respondents to select "prefer not to answer" on questions with which they felt uncomfortable and many questions allowed respondents to select all applicable responses. Therefore, as mentioned above, the actual number of respondents per question varies throughout the survey. Any comparisons that are made between this year's data and previous years'



data are intended only as comparisons of absolute percentages; statistical significance was not assessed. Additionally, the wording across years has been revised on various questions. Thus, trends across years have not been universally assessed.

The survey questions were a combination of multiple choice and open-ended questions to allow for diverse responses from participants.⁵ With the exception of most mental health

questions and select questions, “Does not apply” and “Prefer not to answer” responses were coded as missing. Multiple response sets were created for questions that allowed more than one response. Frequencies and basic crosstabs were performed in order to perform univariate and basic bivariate analyses.

Standardized, scientifically validated instruments are incorporated into the survey to enable future comparisons with other

populations. Examples of standardized instruments include the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI-4), a four-item measure focusing on relationships, the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) utilized to screen for depressive disorders, and the Cut Down, Annoyed, Guilty, Eye-Opener (CAGE), a 4-question screen for substance abuse. Finally, a three item screen, called the Partner Violence Screen was used.

The open-ended questions were analyzed using a two-part qualitative coding method: the analysts, were trained and subsequently applied descriptive coding as a first-round coding technique⁶ and then used axial coding on the second round.⁷ The themes that resulted from axial coding were then recombined with the quantitative results to act as exemplars in the complete survey report, providing deeper explanation.⁸ Due to the large volume of open-ended responses—more than 12,000—a team of six analysts coded the data. The team ensured that each individual coding effort was consistent with the interpretations from the other analysts by discussing the methods by which the themes and categories were understood and defined.⁹ One analyst acted as the codebook editor by evaluating both the fractured and axial coding from each analyst to achieve consistency.¹⁰

Through this method, common themes were identified and quotes are included throughout this report to demonstrate the perspectives of the service member or military family members on specific topics. In addition to the open-ended questions, respondents had the option to provide qualitative answers to some of the quantitative questions. These answers were similarly coded and used to illustrate the quantitative responses for those questions. The quotes are not necessarily representative of the entire sample, nor do they necessarily represent the opinions of BSF or the IVMF. Rather, quotes used in the report represent common themes among the participants who responded to open-ended questions across all the quotes as determined through the coding process.

Survey Respondents · ★ · ★ · ★ · ★ · ★ ·

The survey generated 6,270 individual responses. The respondents represent a cross-section of military family members from all branches of services, ranks, and regions, both within the United States and on overseas military installations. Survey respondents were asked to identify their primary relationship with the military based on the service members through whom they receive DoD benefits, if applicable. A clear majority (70%) of the participants were spouses of either active duty service members (3,169) or veterans (633). Twenty-one percent of the sample were either service members (252) or veterans (825) themselves. The remaining participants included parents (5%), children (3%), siblings (1%), and domestic partners (1%) of either an active duty service member (446) or a veteran (448).

The geographic breakdown of the sample within the Continental U.S. (CONUS) is shown in the figure below. Approximately 95% of respondents lived in the U.S while 5% of respondents lived outside of the CONUS. Within the U.S, 42% of the respondents lived in six states: Virginia, California, Texas, Florida, North Carolina, and Georgia.

Sixty-eight percent of the survey respondents were affiliated with a family member currently on active-duty while 31% were on active-duty in the past but not currently (93% of those on active-duty were military spouses and 49% of those previously on active-duty were service members). Eighteen percent of the survey respondents were affiliated with the National Guard or Reserves (12% currently on active-duty, 7% had separated or retired from the National Guard or Reserves). Sixty-five percent of respondents were affiliated with enlisted service personnel, 3% with warrant officers, and 31% were commissioned officers. Nine percent of the respondents had been in the military for 3 years or fewer, 20% had been in the

Figure 1: Location of Respondents

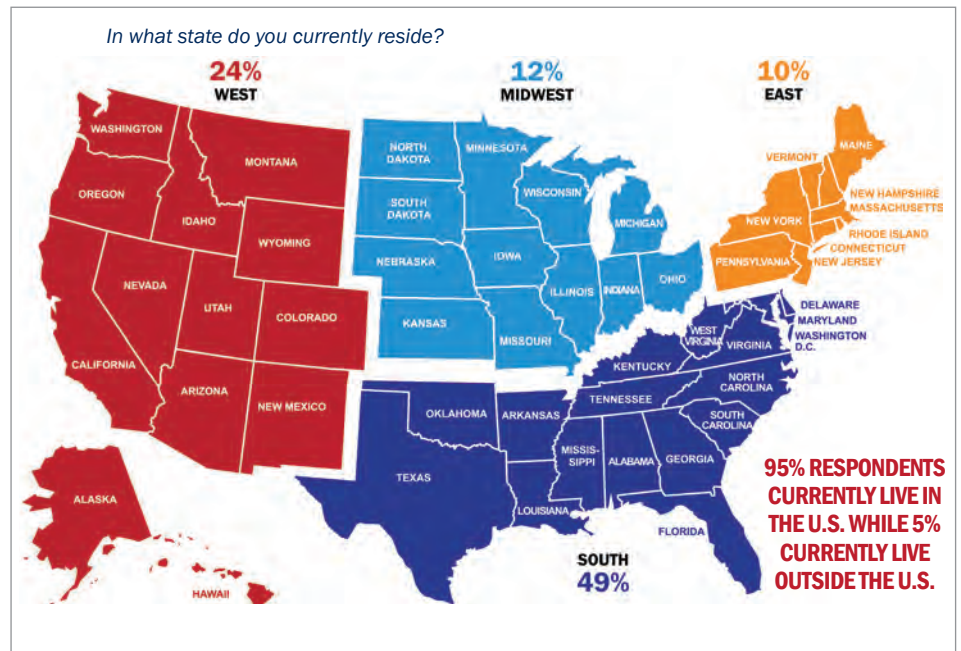
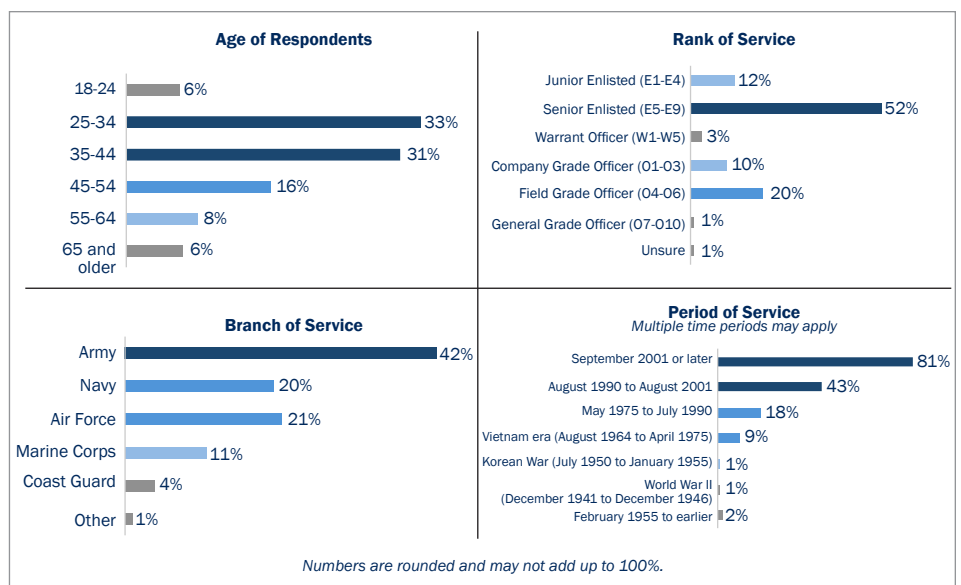


Figure 2: Demographics of Respondents



military for four to eight years, 23% had been in the military for nine to 14 years, 24% had been in the military for 15 to 20 years, 14% had been in the military for 21 to 25 years, 7% had been in the military for 26 to 30 years, and 3% had been in the military

for 30 years or more.

Six percent of respondents were between the ages of 18 and 24, 64% of respondents were between the ages of 25 and 44, 24% of respondents were between the ages of 45 and 54, and 6% of respondents were 65

or over. The majority, eighty-two percent of respondents were female, and 83% of respondents had children (27% had children who were under the age of five, 44% had children between five and 12 years of age, 18% had children between 13 and 17 years of age, 9% had children between 18 and 24 years of age and 2% had children 25 years or over). Nineteen percent of respondents identified themselves as being in a minority race/ethnic group. Twenty-four percent of respondents had completed some college credits, but had not received a degree, 12% had completed an associate's degree, 31% had completed a bachelor's degree, and 21% had completed an advanced degree (masters, doctoral, or professional degree).

In summary, these demographics outline a diverse group of individuals from a variety of backgrounds, drawn together by their commitment to service and shared support for military and veteran-connected families. It is important to note that the sampling protocol applied to this study is subject to the introduction of selection bias. The survey was proactively designed to minimize and mitigate potential systemic sampling error and adhered to generally accepted scientific practices for non-probability sampling. For example,

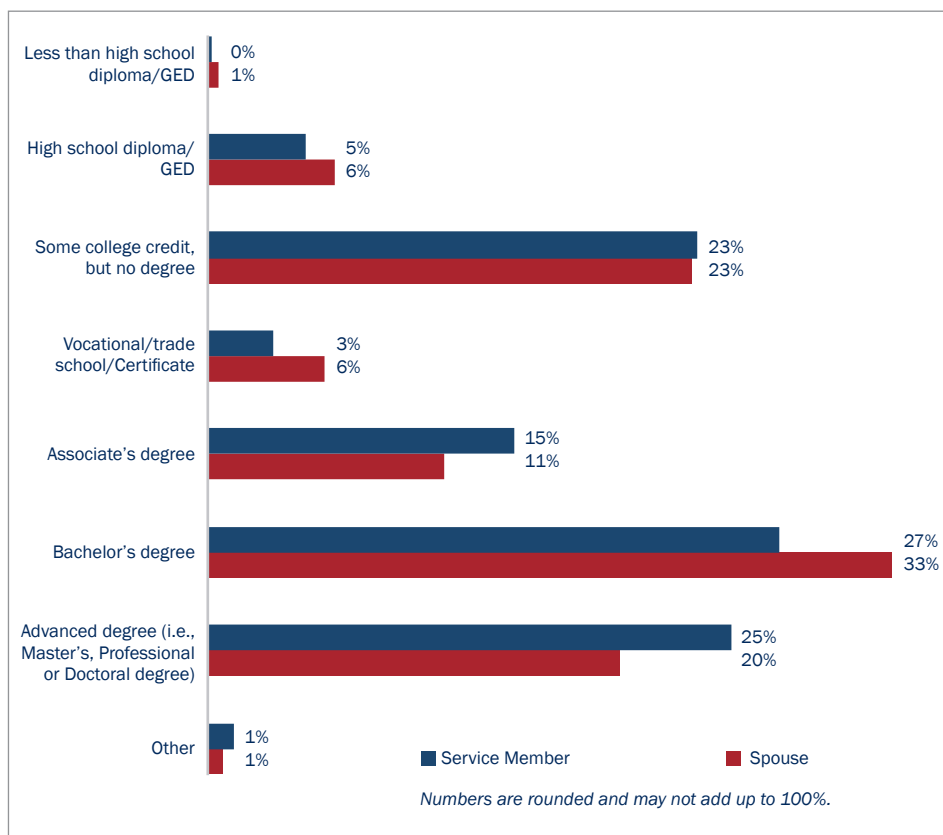
- The study design, survey instrument, and associated study materials were subject to a third party, scientific IRB. IRB approval of the study design, survey instrument, and associated study materials was secured prior to any data collection.
- Outreach to the sample population was broad, far-reaching, and included: (1) direct awareness building focused

towards military families via various social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, blog posts, and partner websites), (2) outreach from a myriad of diverse military family and military and veteran-connected nonprofits, supportive service organizations, and professional organizations, and (3) an intentional explanation of the study's objective (provided to each possible participant whether they subsequently completed the survey or not) to minimize self-selection bias toward any single focal

issue and, thus, mitigate the respondents' propensity to participate based upon any specific, issue-based self-interest (e.g., benefits, employment, wellness, etc.).

- Post-test analysis was conducted and suggested that the demographic profile descriptive of the sampled population is generally representative of the broader subject population (when compared with externally validated data sources descriptive of the subject population).

Figure 3: Respondents' Highest Educational Attainment



Survey Highlights · ★ · ★ · ★ · ★ · ★ ·

OVERVIEW AND TOP ISSUES

In February 2014, BSF fielded its fifth annual online survey to determine the contemporary issues facing military families. The key concerns identified by the responding military family members were: pay and benefits and changes to retirement benefits. Other salient issues include military spouse employment, the effects of deployment on children, the military civilian divide, and military lifestyle uncertainty. Additionally, this year’s findings also revealed insights on financial readiness, caregiving, mental health, transition, and the impact of downsizing on the military community.

This year, the top issues were broken down by demographic subgroups (active duty spouses, veterans, and active duty service members) to identify how each subgroup viewed various issues. Findings showed that the top issues of military pay and benefits and changes in retirement remained the top two concerns regardless of subgroup, while the other issues varied across spouses, veterans, and active duty service members. Spouse employment, for example, was a top issue for military spouses and active duty service members whereas the disability claim backlog, posttraumatic stress, combat stress, traumatic brain injury, and disconnection between military and civilians were top-five issues for veteran respondents only. Finally, operational tempo (including deployments and training time) was a top-five issue only for service member respondents.

PAY/BENEFITS

When service members and spouses (both active duty and veteran) were asked about their confidence level in receiving various benefits, 32% reported they were confident they would receive VA home loan benefits and GI Bill benefits. Pay benefits (i.e., pension), disability pay benefits, and health care post-retirement had the lowest percentages of respondents expressing

Figure 4: Top Military Issues by Subgroup

Top Military Issues	Active Duty Spouses	Veteran	Active Duty Member
Military pay/benefits	73%	64%	75%
Change in retirement	63%	69%	75%
Impact of deployment on children	43%	22%	25%
Military spouse employment	42%	17%	29%
Military lifestyle uncertainty	32%	20%	41%
Op tempo/deployment/training time	27%	28%	40%
PTSD/Combat stress/TBI	18%	30%	15%
Disconnection between military and civilians	19%	41%	24%
Disability claim backlog	7%	42%	23%

“very confident” ratings. Sixty-six percent of active duty and veteran respondents indicated they had or would be transferring the Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to a spouse or child, and 35% indicated they have or will use their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits themselves. Over one-third of active duty and spouse respondents (36%) agreed that the costs of rent were higher than their Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH).

FINANCIAL READINESS

Forty-nine percent of both service members and spouses indicated that financial issues were a top stressor during their time in the military, and 60% of respondents indicated that their family’s current financial condition caused “some stress” or a “great deal of stress.” Among respondents, the top three obstacles to financial security were

- (1) spouse employment (40%)
- (2) uncertainty in military life (38%), and
- (3) uncertainty in potential changes in benefits (34%).

TRANSITION

Fifty-three percent of veterans and 55% of spouses described their transition from military service as “difficult,” and the highest percentages of respondents noted family, employment, health care, and education as their most salient transition concerns. Sixty-one percent of veteran respondents reported they had started their Transition GPS (the military’s transition preparation training) class between one and six months before their separation date, and the majority (71%) reported they felt “prepared” for their transition. A variety of resources were used by veterans during the transition including family network (66%), veteran service organizations’ help with VA disability claims (53%), educational benefits for self, spouse, and/or children (55%), and veteran peer network and support (53%).

VETERAN EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION

Approximately 63% of active duty service member and veteran respondents



indicated they joined the military to learn skills for civilian jobs. Fifty-percent of veteran respondents reported that they were employed and 12% reported they were not employed but looking for work. The majority of veteran respondents indicated their military experience was “well received” (57%) or were “indifferent” (32%) in their workplace. Only 8% reported it was “poorly received.”

Approximately 74% of service member respondents indicated they joined the military to receive educational benefits, and approximately 13% of veteran respondents reported they were currently attending school. The majority (53%) of veteran respondents completed their highest level of education at public colleges or universities, private colleges or universities (21%), and community colleges (15%). Likewise, 39% indicated they had completed their education at a for-profit institution, 38% from a nonprofit institution, and 21% were unsure of their school’s status. When asked about how their military experience was received by their educational institution, the majority (57%) of current student veteran respondents indicated their military experience was “well received,” 34% reported they were met with indifference, and 8% reported that their military experience was “poorly received.”

MILITARY SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT

Eighty-four percent of employed spouses indicated that the military lifestyle had a negative impact on their ability to pursue a career. Of the 57% of active duty spouses who were not currently employed, 58% reported they wanted to be. Active duty spouse respondents who wanted to work but were not employed were asked their reasons for not working. Thirty-eight percent noted child care was too expensive, 35% cited being unable to find employment at their current duty station, and 32% mentioned issues of timing related to deployments. Among spouses who reported they were not working and not seeking employment, the top reason reported by 74% of respondents was “I prefer to stay home with my children, while 11% cited “I don’t want to work.” Nineteen percent of military spouse respondents who were working full or part-time reported combined annual household incomes (with their active duty service member) of less than \$50,000, placing them slightly below the U.S. median household income of \$51,371.¹¹

MILITARY CHILDREN, MILITARY CHILD EDUCATION, AND EFMP

Ninety-one percent of respondents had children under age 18 who had lived at home during a deployment or routine separation. Among those parents, separation anxiety and worry were the predominant negative impacts on the children reported, while adaptability and increased independence were the positive impacts reported. Families with an Exceptional Family Member (EFM) face unique challenges. Families with an EFM noted challenges particularly during Permanent Change of Station (PCS) moves, including problems with

- (1) vocational services for adult family members with special needs
- (2) early intervention services for infants or toddlers
- (3) receiving SSI/SSDI after a move
- (4) access to respite care
- (5) accessing community or state based supports, such as Medicaid waiver benefits.

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS OF NOTE

Volunteerism and Civic Engagement

Sixty-eight percent of respondents had volunteered in the past year, and 59% actively sought out volunteering opportunities in the local community (versus on an installation). Eleven percent of survey respondents with at least one child over the age of 18 reported having a child who has joined the military. This is compared to 1% of the general population who serve in the military.¹²

Child Care

Sixty-seven percent of respondents stated that the availability of child care had impacted their pursuit of employment or education and 38% of active duty spouses who are not employed but desire to be indicated the cost of child care was a reason for not working. Over 51% of those using any type of child care are spending over \$200 per month. Ninety-four percent of those using child care on a full time basis are spending over \$200 per month and 85% report spending over \$400 per month.

Mental Health and Wellness

Active duty service members and spouses generally reported they were able to cope with stress. However, 39% of spouses and 30% of active duty service members reported feeling “stressed” either most or all of the time. Top stressors include deployment and separation, financial stress, and employment related stress. During deployments, stressors for spouses include isolation, children’s issues, and household responsibilities. Service members also reported deployment related stressors including: isolation or lack of social support (38%), household responsibilities (34%), and personal emotional or mental health issues (28%).

One-third of respondents reported having sought mental health counseling in the past year, and across all types of therapy, respondents reported a preference for civilian providers. For PTS and PTSD



treatment, differences were seen across active duty and veterans, with active duty respondents expressing work-related concerns about seeking treatment. Thirty-six percent of veteran (n=84) and 35% of active duty respondents (n=37) who reported having previously received a diagnosis of PTSD or had symptoms of PTS had not sought treatment because they did not think it would help.

Depression and Military Suicide

Higher percentages of veterans and veteran spouses reported depression symptoms compared to their active duty counterparts. Veterans also reported higher rates of suicidal ideation (13%) in the past year, more than either active duty service members (9%) or spouse respondents (8%).

Caregiving

Thirty-two percent of respondents indicated they had provided care for someone in the past twelve months, and 52% of those reported they had been providing care for more than two years. Fifteen percent of caregiver respondents reported they spent 40 or more hours per week providing care, which is the equivalent of a full time job. Fifty-six percent reported that caregiving was “extremely” or “somewhat” emotionally stressful. Caregivers of veterans indicated the following services would be most helpful:

- (1) integrated sources of information
- (2) coordinated services through a caseworker
- (3) information about benefits
- (4) advocacy service to minimize “red tape
- (5) an organized list of contact information and resources, and
- (6) online support groups with other caregivers.



Social Media

Seventy-five percent of survey respondents indicated that social media was important in connecting with a deployed or service member from whom they are geographically separated. Facebook and email were the leading communication platforms used by all respondents.

Respondents reported using Facebook to stay in touch with distant family, friends, and service members. Facebook, Military.com, Military Times, and Military OneSource were the top sites reported for gathering military-related information.



SELECT RECOMMENDATIONS

- The DoD, VA, and Congress can work collaboratively and proactively with stakeholders, nonprofits, and local and state governments to promote transparent dissemination of information (through a variety of official and unofficial sources) about program, resources and changes to pay and benefits.
- Federal entities such as the DoD, VA, and Congress can work to ensure there is seamless access to care when service members, veterans, and their families shift from one system of care to another; resources can be shared at the community level where there is the greatest need; continue to garner support across sectors: government, private, and nonprofit sectors.
- The DoD, VA, and Congress can recognize the challenges of transition impacting service members as well as families and devote federal resources not only to veterans but also their families who can be critical supports emotionally, financially, and logistically.
- The DoD, the Department of Veterans Affairs, Congress, and local governments can engage community stakeholders at the local level to build and a network of providers, teachers, and community agents who are equipped to understand military culture.
- Communities (e.g., local governments, schools, organizations, religious institutions) can support the transition of service members, veterans, and their families by ensuring seamless access to services, employment, and access to targeted resources and services, openly prioritizing their needs through policy, practice, and proactive leadership.
- Public, private, and nonprofit employers can work collaboratively with stakeholders to support the hiring of transitioning service members, veterans, and military spouses.

Conclusion · ★ · ★ · ★ · ★ · ★ ·



Changes in the national security priorities have ripple effects on military families that were evident in the responses of this year's survey participants. For example, military spouses were asked about their lives, and uncertainty was noted as one of their top five concerns. Across veterans, service members, and spouses, pay and benefits, changes in retirement, transition, and concerns about employment after service were key concerns and high numbers of both veterans and service members acknowledged the divide between the military and civilian world. Since this survey was administered, sequestration and subsequent budget cuts have led to deployment cancellations and delays, and reductions in force mean that some service member are effectively being 'fired' from the service. Likewise, significant problems in the VA system of care have come to light and confidence in that system will need to be restored. As readers review this report, we encourage readers to keep these current events in mind as they

interpret the survey findings.

That said, the broad context for military families is both dynamic and ambiguous. As policy makers order changes at the federal level, military families and service members wait to see how those changes affect them. While DoD and nonprofits have worked to better understand the military community in the past decade-plus of war, troop drawdowns and diminishing federal resources are quickly changing the landscape. The confluence of these factors will require critical thinking, thoughtful allocation of resources, creative collaboration at the local level (such as those introduced by the First Lady's Joining Forces initiative), and perhaps most importantly, partnership between government, nonprofit, and private sectors.

Perhaps it is the continual and intense level of adaptability that has consistently encouraged respondents to report that civilians do not understand the service or sacrifices made by military families. After all, these demands have pushed

the bounds of resiliency that are perhaps comparable only for few segments of the general population. This survey is intended, in part, to bridge the perceived gap between the military community and the general population by providing concrete information about the unique aspects of military life and by highlighting the contributions of the military service culture to American life.

BSF challenges the readers of this report to use these results to align their resources and "do more with less" just as military service members and their families have done both in operations and on the home front. One of the biggest challenges we face as a country is supporting our military community both so that our all-volunteer force remains a sustainable alternative, and so that a generation of service members, veterans and military family members are both empowered and encouraged to share their sense of service, adaptability, and civic mindedness with the nation and within local communities.

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