

BRIEF #1:

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Climate Snapshot Poll

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“Senior leaders have a lot of tough decisions to make. Stay apolitical on the subject and support service members and their families to the best of our ability.”

—Anonymous respondent

This brief is part of a forthcoming series based on results of the COVID-19 climate poll. The survey remains active, and we plan to conduct follow-up polls to monitor and share changes and trends so that we can continue to engage and best support those we serve.

OVERVIEW

Military Times and the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) at Syracuse University conduct recurring snapshot polls of the military and veteran community. The purpose of these polls is to provide timely insights on the social, economic, education, and policy views and concerns of military-affiliated individuals. As the world navigates the Coronavirus (COVID-19) health crisis, IVMF remains committed to serving transitioning service members, veterans, and their family members. We are determined to stay informed of the evolving impacts, needs, and challenges experienced by this military-connected community. Therefore, in partnership with Military Times, the IVMF created and conducted a COVID-19 climate poll.

Many military and veteran serving organizations have responded quickly to this crisis and have surveyed their memberships to determine the immediate effects of the pandemic. Several surveys have measured the impacts on employment, education, childcare, children's education, mental and physical health, and caregiving across various military, veteran, and military family populations. In an effort to provide new insights and add to the emerging COVID-19 survey research in this space, this poll focused on service member and veteran perceptions of immediate and future (three months) threats of COVID-19, their need for and knowledge of resources, and their confidence in various levels of public leadership.

Participants were asked about the perceived threat to various aspects of their lives ranging from the U.S. economy to their personal financial situation, and were also asked about the national security climate, impacts to their employment and job security. Participants were also asked their need for and knowledge of various resources at multiple levels (local community, state, federal), their confidence in the response in institutional responses to the crisis, and numerous demographic questions.

METHODOLOGY

Military Times/IVMF conducted a voluntary, confidential online survey that collected information related to the COVID-19 climate. The survey included a series of questions focused on military and veteran family needs, concerns, missed events, along with overall thoughts regarding the COVID-19 crisis. Participants were subscribers of Military Times publications and their military status was verified through official Defense Department email addresses. The data included in these analyses were collected between March 26, 2020 and March 31, 2020. At the time the poll was downloaded for analysis, on March 31, 2020 at 10:50am, a total of 7,693 Military Times subscribers had responded, and 4,047 finished the poll. Of those that provided their current military status (n= 4,022), 1,507 were active duty service members (38%), 47 were National Guardsmen (1%), 135 were Reservists (3%), 1,783 were veterans (45%), 156 were family members (4%), and 338 reported being “none of the above” (9%). Standard methodology was used to weight the results according to the gender and age for the U.S. veteran population, as well as rank, gender, and service branch for the active duty population. The analysis below is reflective of the veteran and active duty weighted samples only.

SUMMARY HIGHLIGHTS

OVERALL OUTLOOK

- Military-affiliated participants consistently view COVID-19 as a **severe (i.e., moderate to extreme) threat to nearly all key issues surveyed.**
- Projecting three months ahead, perceptions of the COVID-19 threat decrease slightly, but overall levels remain severe for most issues.
- Perceived threat was most extreme toward national issues (public health, economy) compared to community or family/personal concerns, though nearly all were a concern for many.
- Some slight differences in perceived threat were observed between sub-groups: active duty/veteran (e.g., economy/employment), gender (e.g., resources, family health, finances), and age (e.g., employment, finances).

“Putting the soldiers at risk, puts the nation at risk, as we need healthy personnel to serve in our armed forces to safeguard this great nation from external and internal threats.”

—Anonymous respondent

NATIONAL OUTLOOK

- Veteran and active duty participants saw a moderate to extreme COVID-19 threat to all three national issues surveyed (in order of severity): the U.S. economy, the health of the U.S. population, and national security.
- Projecting three months ahead, overall perceptions remain severe across all three issues, though decrease slightly. Veterans perceived the threat slightly higher than active duty both now and in the near future.
- Perceptions varied slightly by gender and age on the issue of threat to U.S. population health. Female respondents (active and veteran) and older veterans (55+) rated the threat slightly higher than their counterparts.

“Military and veteran families need the same as the rest of the community: proper and efficient testing, monetary assistance to help stabilize themselves a volatile job market, and [peace] of mind.”

—Anonymous respondent

COMMUNITY OUTLOOK

- Veteran and active duty participants reported a moderate to extreme threat to the local resources and the day-to-day life in their communities.
- Neither groups expect to see this to change in the next three months.
- Female and older veteran participants rated the threat slightly higher than their counterparts.

“My wife and I are both veterans using our education benefits and we use our housing allowance as our only income. During this crisis, the most important thing to us is that we are guaranteed that our benefits will not change due to colleges being forced to go online around the nation.”

—Anonymous respondent

FAMILY & INDIVIDUAL OUTLOOK

- Veteran and active duty participants reported a moderate threat to their personal health and family well-being.
 - **Personal health:** Veterans and active duty females rated the threat higher than their counterparts.
 - **Family well-being:** Older veterans (55+) and active duty females rated the threat higher than their counterparts.
- Compared to other issues surveyed, veteran and active duty participants both rated the threat to their job security and financial readiness somewhat lower (slight to moderate threat).
 - **Job security:** Veterans and active duty females rated the threat higher than their counterparts.
 - **Financial readiness:** Younger participants (all groups) and active duty females rated the threat higher than their counterparts.

“I’m transitioning into retirement and so very lost myself. I can’t get civilian medical records during to closures which is delaying my ability to file my disability claims. In the meantime, I am fearful of finding a job due to closures, but now limited due to home schooling (single parent of 4). I don’t believe this is unknown territory. This is not the first pandemic, although we are in different times.”

—Anonymous respondent

INITIAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR KEY STAKEHOLDERS

(e.g., policymakers, practitioners, philanthropy, researchers)

In all, the findings detailed in this first brief reveal widespread concern and uncertainty among the military and veteran community members who completed this COVID-19 focused poll. Based on these initial findings, we conclude with three initial recommendations for stakeholders and champions (e.g., policymakers, practitioners, philanthropy, researchers) to consider today, in the short-term, and the long-term.

TODAY. Seek ways to promote continuity of operations and sustainability of critical community-based providers that serve veterans and military families.

SHORT-TERM. Double-down on resources and interventions that address known family and individual stressors, enable access to care and services, and reduce the risk for adverse outcomes (e.g., unemployment, housing/financial insecurity, suicidal ideation).

LONG-TERM. Monitor emerging needs, pre-position resources, and tailor interventions to various subgroups of need focused on post-COVID-19 recovery.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:

<https://ivmf.syracuse.edu/military-times-ivmf-snapshot-polls/>

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