**INSTITUTE FOR VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES**

**Research Brief: The Impacts and Opportunities of Military Life for Military Children**

**April 2021**

# MILITARY CHILDREN POPULATION

## Total Force Families [[1]](#endnote-1)

* Over 1.6 million military children in the U.S.
* 70% of military children are 11 years of age or younger
  + 38% are ages 0-5 years
  + 32% are ages 6-11 years
  + 24% are ages 12-18 years
  + 6% are ages 19-22 years

## Active Duty Families

* 977,191 Active Duty Military Children
* 36.5% of active duty military personnel have children
  + 4.0% are single, with children
  + 30.1% are married to a civilian, with children
  + 2.4% are dual-military, with children

## Selected Reserve Families

* 674,223 Selected Reserve Children
* 40.9% of Selected Reserve members have children
* 9.1% are single, with children
* 30.2% are married to a civilian, with children
* 1.6% are dual-military, with children

Veteran Families[[2]](#endnote-2)

* Limited research on children of veterans
* Unknown what proportion of veterans have children.
* A 2014 study estimated there are 2.1 million children of post-9/11 veterans

# EXPERIENCES OF MILITARY CHILDREN[[3]](#endnote-3)

* Can vary widely, but there are some commonalities.
  + Transitions (such as relocations, family reintegration, military to civilian transition)
    - Relocations
      * Example: School and community transitions
        + It is estimated the average military child will move six to nine times during their K-12 education.[[4]](#endnote-4)
        + 56% of active-duty family respondents reported their oldest child is thriving at school[[5]](#endnote-5)
    - Family Reintegration
      * Example: Military to civilian transition
        + 41% of post-9/11 veteran respondents reported reintegration to family during military to civilian transition was difficult or very difficult[[6]](#endnote-6)
  + Separations (can be due to training, schooling, deployment, etc.)
    - * 32% of active duty family respondents who had recently geobached reported doing so for their children’s education[[7]](#endnote-7)
      * 44% of active duty spouse respondents cited isolation from family and friends as a stressor[[8]](#endnote-8)
* The needs of military children can differ by:
  + Military service (e.g., rank, branch, deployments)
  + Military status (e.g., active duty, veteran)
  + Family structure (e.g., dual-military, caregiving families)
  + Child characteristics (e.g., age, gender)
  + Child needs (e.g., special educational needs, age-related needs)
  + Parent needs (e.g., mental health care, employment)
  + Family characteristics (e.g., race, religion)

# impacts of service[[9]](#endnote-9)

* Top 5 impacts of deployment: [[10]](#endnote-10)
  + - Negative Impacts:
      * Worry (50%), separation anxiety (50%), difficulty sleeping/nightmares (39%), irritability (33%), aggression (20%)
    - Positive impacts:
      * Increased independence (33%), adaptability (29%), resilience (29%), personal growth (20%), increased pride (19%)
  + Spotlight on Strengths [[11]](#endnote-11)
    - Parents report adaptability, openness, and kindness
      * "Our daughter is adaptable to new situations. She is able to transition into new routines and surroundings with ease.”
      * “My children respect and value cultures and regions that are new to them.”
      * “They have learned kindness since they know how it feels to be the new kid.”
    - Greater sense of civic responsibility in parents linked to more positive impacts in children

# IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND RESEARCH[[12]](#endnote-12)

* Identification and education within communities
  + Providers, educators, neighbors must first be aware of military-connected children within their community. Identification of military children can result in the following:
    - Improved connections to available resources and access to care
    - Encouraging community members to provide extra assistance to children and family during times of transition
  + Need for increased civilian understanding of military culture and military child experiences to strengthen social support and sense of community belonging
    - The National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine recommends that DoD play a role in encouraging civilian understanding and focus on addressing stereotypes and misinformation
* To address gaps - researchers, policymakers, and providers need to focus on and better understand:
  + Children of veterans
  + Long-term impacts of military service on children
  + Children of Selected Reserve
  + Children in caregiving families, blended families, dual-military families
  + Military children with special needs
  + LGBTQ+ military children
  + Military children in racially/ethnically diverse families

1. **Total Force Families** *include Active Duty and Selected Reserve families.* For more information see U.S. Department of Defense. (2019). *2019 Demographics: Profile of the military community*. Washington, D.C. Retrieved from <https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2019-demographics-report.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. **Veteran Families:** *There is little research on children of veterans and it is unknown what proportion of veterans have children. Hanson and Woods (2016) used data from the 2013 and 2014 American Community Survey (ACS) to analyze post-9/11 veteran families with children.*

   Hanson, D., & Woods, T. (2016). *The state of post-9/11 veteran families.* Urban Institute.

   Retrieved from <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/85986/the_state_of_post-911_veteran_families_final_last_11_21_2016.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. **Experiences of Military Children:** *There is a large body of research on military children. The following list of references is not exhaustive but includes some seminal and comprehensive articles that were used for this research brief:*

   Chandra, A., Lara-Cinisomo, S., Jaycox, L., Tanielian, T., Burns, R. M., Ruder, T., & Han, B. (2010). Children on the homefront: The experience of children from military families*. Pediatrics, 125*, 16-25. Retrieved from <https://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT341.html>

   Military Children and Families. (2013). [Special issue]. *The Future of Children, 23*(2). Retrieved from <https://futureofchildren.princeton.edu/sites/futureofchildren/files/media/military_children_and_families_23_02_fulljournal.pdf>

   National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2019). *Strengthening the Military Family Readiness System for a Changing American Society*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. Retrieved from <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/25380/strengthening-the-military-family-readiness-system-for-a-changing-american-society> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. It is possible the average number of moves is lower since some families may leave service or geobach to provide or ensure stability in their children’s education.

   Stat from DoDEA: <https://www.dodea.edu/partnership/about.cfm#:~:text=As%20military%20families%20transition%20from,times%20during%20a%20school%20career>.  
   49% of active duty family respondents reported their oldest child has experienced at least 3 school transitions due to a PCS move. Analyses conducted with unpublished data from 2019 Blue Star Families’ annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Stat from Blue Star Families (2021). 2020 Military Family Lifestyle Survey Comprehensive Report. Blue Star Families. For more information, please see <https://bluestarfam.org/survey> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Stat from Blue Star Families (2017). 2016 Military Family Lifestyle Survey Comprehensive Report. Blue Star Families. For more information, please see <https://bluestarfam.org/survey> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. “*Geo-baching” is defined here as living apart from service member voluntarily, not including times of deployment.* “*Recently geo-bached” refers to the five years prior to survey fielding*. Stat from Blue Star Families (2020). 2019 Military Family Lifestyle Survey Comprehensive Report. Blue Star Families. For more information, please see <https://bluestarfam.org/survey> [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Stat from Blue Star Families (2020). 2019 Military Family Lifestyle Survey Comprehensive Report. Blue Star Families. For more information, please see <https://bluestarfam.org/survey> [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. **Impacts of Service**: *There are both positive and negative impacts of the military lifestyle on children. While it is important to take a strengths-based approach, there are challenges for military children and their families. The impacts of individual and cumulative stressors, short- and long-term stressors, adverse experiences (e.g., exposure to trauma), etc. vary widely.*

   Park, N. (2011). Military children and families: Strengths and challenges during peace and war. *American Psychologist, 66*(1), 65-72. doi: 10.1037/a0021249

   Military Children and Families. (2013). [Special issue]. *The Future of Children, 23*(2). Retrieved from <https://futureofchildren.princeton.edu/sites/futureofchildren/files/media/military_children_and_families_23_02_fulljournal.pdf>

   Creech, S. K., Hadley, W., & Borsari, B. (2014). The impact of military deployment and

   reintegration on children and parenting: A systematic review. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 45*(6), 452-464. <http://dx.doi.org.libezproxy2.syr.edu/10.1037/a0035055> [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. **Impacts of Deployment:** Blue Star Families (2016). 2015 Military Family Lifestyle Survey Comprehensive Report. Blue Star Families. For more information, please see <https://bluestarfam.org/survey> [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. **Positive Impacts of Military Lifestyle**: *Analyses conducted with unpublished data from 2015 Blue Star Families’ annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey. Presented at Society for Research on Child Development Special Topic Meeting.*

    Linsner, R. K., Mulvaney, M., & Maury, R. V. (October 2018). Character benefits of the military lifestyle for military children. Poster presented at *SRCD Special Topic Meeting: Promoting Character Development Among Diverse Children and Adolescents*, Philadelphia, PA. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. **Implications for Practice and Research:**

    Military Child Education Coalition and the Center for Public Research and Leadership at Columbia University. (2017). *The Challenges of Supporting Highly Mobile, Military-Connected Children in School Transitions: The Current Environment*. Retrieved from <https://www.militarychild.org/upload/files/resources/Military_Student_Transitions_Study_2017.pdf>

    National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2019). *Strengthening the Military Family Readiness System for a Changing American Society*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. Retrieved from <https://www.nap.edu/catalog/25380/strengthening-the-military-family-readiness-system-for-a-changing-american-society>

    Blue Star Families (2020). 2019 Military Family Lifestyle Survey Comprehensive Report. Blue Star Families. For more information, please see <https://bluestarfam.org/survey> [↑](#endnote-ref-12)