

RESEARCH BRIEF | APRIL 2021

THE IMPACTS & OPPORTUNITIES OF MILITARY LIFE FOR MILITARY CHILDREN



MILITARY CHILD POPULATION

Total Force Families¹

There are

**OVER
1.6 MILLION**
military children in the U.S.

AGE OF MILITARY CHILDREN

- 38% 0-5 yrs.
- 32% 6-11 yrs.
- 24% 12-18 yrs.
- 6% 19-22 yrs.

70%
11 YRS. OR
YOUNGER

ACTIVE DUTY

977,191

active duty military children

36.5% ACTIVE DUTY
HAVE CHILDREN

- Single, with children (4.0%)
- Married to a civilian, with children (30.1%)
- Dual-military, with children (2.4%)



SELECTED RESERVE

674,223

selected reserve children

40.9% SELECTED RESERVE
HAVE CHILDREN

- Single, with children (9.1%)
- Married to a civilian, with children (30.2%)
- Dual-military, with children (1.6%)

Veterans Families²

A 2014 STUDY ESTIMATED

2.1 MILLION
post-9/11 veteran children

LIMITED
RESEARCH
on children
of veterans

UNKNOWN
what proportion of
veterans have children.

EXPERIENCES OF MILITARY CHILDREN³

Can vary widely, but there are some commonalities.



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, age-related)
- ▶ Parent needs (e.g., mental health care, employment)
- ▶ Family characteristics (e.g., race, religion)

COMMON ELEMENTS

Transitions

(Such as relocations, family reintegration, military to civilian transition)

▶ RELOCATIONS

School & community transitions

56% active duty family respondents reported their oldest child is thriving at school⁵

IT IS ESTIMATED THE AVERAGE MILITARY CHILD WILL MOVE SIX TO NINE TIMES DURING THEIR K-12 EDUCATION.⁴

▶ FAMILY REINTEGRATION

Military to civilian transition

41% post-9/11 veteran respondents reported reintegration to family during military to civilian transition was difficult or very difficult⁶

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 education⁷

44% of active duty spouse respondents cited isolation from family and friends as a stressor⁸

IMPACTS OF SERVICE ON MILITARY CHILDREN⁹

TOP 5 IMPACTS OF DEPLOYMENT¹⁰

POSITIVE

Increased independence (33%)
Adaptability (29%)
Resilience (29%)
Personal growth (20%)
Increased pride (19%)

NEGATIVE

Worry (50%)
Separation anxiety (50%)
Difficulty sleeping/nightmares (39%)
Irritability (33%)
Aggression (20%)

SPOTLIGHT ON STRENGTHS¹¹

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 RESEARCH¹²



IDENTIFICATION & 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 families 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 SHOULD FOCUS ON THE FOLLOWING:

- ▶ 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

Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) is the first national institute in higher education singularly focused on advancing the lives of the nation's military, veterans and their families. Through its professional staff and experts, the IVMF delivers leading programs in career and entrepreneurship education and training, while also conducting actionable research, policy analysis, and program evaluations. The IVMF also supports veterans and their families, once they transition back into civilian life, as they navigate the maze of social services in their communities, enhancing access to this care working side-by-side with local providers across the country. The Institute is committed to advancing the postservice lives of those who have served in America's armed forces and their families. For more information, visit ivmf.syracuse.edu.

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REFERENCES

- 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>
- 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
- 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>
- ⁴ It is possible the average number of moves is lower since some families may leave service or geoback 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.5>

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.
- 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>
- 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>
- ⁷ "Geo-batching" is defined here as living apart from service member voluntarily, not including times of deployment. Recently geo-batched 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>
- 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>
- 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>
- 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>
- 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.
- 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>