Blue Star Families

2013 Military Family Lifestyle Survey

Comprehensive Report

Foreword

May 1, 2013

The unique military lifestyle is in some ways a world that must be lived to be known, but must be shared to be understood. Surveys are one way to provide insight into the challenges and the strengths of our nation's military families. Now in its fourth iteration, the Blue Star Families' Military Family Lifestyle Survey highlights the experiences of our military community after more than a decade of war.

With new budget uncertainties, it is more important than ever to make sure we have innovative, effective programming and collaborative partnerships to support our military families. One avenue established in support of such efforts is the *Joining Forces* initiative, launched by First Lady, Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden to raise awareness about the service, sacrifice, and needs of our nation's service members, veterans, and military families.

Joining Forces has highlighted the value of partnerships and collaboration in the way ahead. For example, when *Joining Forces*, now in its second year, was first launched in February 2012, only 11 states had legislation with key measures to support military spouses on the books. Now, that number is 29 states and growing. And, in response to concerns about our military children's ability to pursue their education, the National Math and Science Initiative (NMSI) is expanding Advance Placement courses in high schools with large military populations. This gives military children in 52 public high schools across 15 states a chance to earn college credit. By this fall, this initiative will expand to 80 schools across 20 states, with the ultimate goal of reaching 250 military connected schools.

These successes demonstrate the importance of partnerships and the spirit of collective action. The public, private, and non-profit sectors all have an important piece of the puzzle and so too do our local communities. It will continue to take strategic collaboration, based on quantifiable research like this survey, to translate goodwill into measurable outcomes that benefit our military community and strengthen our nation.

We encourage you to take the findings and analysis of these results and seek out ways to make a difference within your own community. Thank you to Blue Star Families and to the organizations that helped to distribute the survey.

Deanie Dempsey

Blue Star Spouse and Mom

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Blue Star Families is a national, non-profit network of military families from all ranks and services, including guard and reserve, dedicated to supporting, connecting and empowering military families. Together with our partners, **Blue Star Families** hosts a robust array of morale and empowerment programs, including Books on Bases, Blue Star Museums, Operation Honor Corps, Blue Star Careers, and Operation Appreciation. **Blue Star Families** also 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 non-profits, community advocates, and public officials, **Blue Star Families** raises awareness of the challenges and strengths of military family life and works to make military life more sustainable. Our worldwide membership includes military spouses, children, parents, and friends, as well as service members, veterans and civilians.

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

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OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Despite the drawdown of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the United States will continue to rely on an all-volunteer military for global stability and security for the foreseeable future. The **Blue Star Families** Military Family Lifestyle Survey takes a proactive look at the current needs and priorities of military families and service members and what can be done to support them. The goal of the survey is to provide concrete data and information about prominent aspects of the military lifestyle so that decision-makers can make informed choices on their behalf. After all, the first step in recognizing the unique and substantial contributions military families make to this nation's security and collective strength, is to understand their perspective and experiences while serving.

Each year, **Blue Star Families** collects data and disseminates the results so that stakeholders can address military families with a timely and relevant perspective. In doing so, decision-makers may be able to target efforts for better reception, applicability, and successful outreach to military families in communities across the nation and around the world. This report details the results and

analysis of the fourth annual **Blue Star Families** Military Family Lifestyle Survey.

The survey, which was conducted online in November 2012 with more than 5,100 military family respondents, was designed to reveal key trends in today's military families by examining, among other things, feelings of stress, financial readiness, spouse employment, effects of deployment, levels of communication, behavioral and mental health, well-being, and civic engagement. The results provide clear insight into the unique lifestyles of modern-day military families after more than a decade of continuous war.

For this survey, **Blue Star Families** was honored to have the assistance of the following partner organizations: The American Red Cross, The Armed Forces Services Corporation, The Armed Forces YMCA, Association of the United States Army (AUSA), Hiring our Heroes, Military.com, the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC), Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), the Military Spouse Corporate Career Network (MSCCN), Military Spouse Magazine, National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS), National Military Family Association (NMFA), Operation Homefront, Our Military Kids, Points of Light, Reserve Officer Association (ROA), Student Veterans of America (SVA), the United Service Organizations (USO), Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW).

The widespread distribution of this survey through our partners and others in the military community greatly contributed to the high level of response and helped achieve a comprehensive sample of military personnel and their families.

METHODOLOGY

The 2013 Survey was designed by **Blue Star Families** with extensive input from military family members and advocates, subject matter experts, and policymakers who work with military families. The survey is intended to facilitate a more complete understanding of the experiences of military families so that communities and policymakers can better serve their unique needs, thereby making voluntary military service sustainable.

Blue Star Families worked with other national military community organizations who 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 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 according to the DoD 2011 Demographic Report.[1]

The survey was administered online through SurveyMonkey.com and generated a self-selected, convenience sample. Of the 5,125 military family members who started the survey, 62% (3,153) completed the entire questionnaire (in totality, there were 143 questions possible). 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 November 1 to December 3, 2012.

Many sections of this survey were only available to spouse and self (service member) respondents; specifically the sections on children's deployment experiences, military child education, the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) schools, Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP), childcare, spousal relationship and deployment stress, mental health issues, suicide prevention, spouse employment, and financial literacy. Questions about the most important military life and national issues, services to military families, social media use, civic engagement, and public policy on the survey were available to all survey respondents.

The majority of questions on the survey were optional, allowing respondents to skip any questions with which they felt uncomfortable or that did not apply to them, and many questions allowed respondents to select all applicable responses. Therefore, as mentioned above, the actual number of responses 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.[2] The quantitative questions were analyzed using SPSS PASW Statistics v20. "Does not apply" and "prefer not to answer" responses were coded as missing, and 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.

The open-ended questions were analyzed using a two-part qualitative coding method: the analysts applied descriptive coding as a first-round coding technique[3] and then used axial coding on the second round.[4] 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.[5] Due to the large volume of open-ended responses, a team of 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.[6] Then, one analyst acted as the codebook editor by evaluating both the fractured and axial coding from each analyst to achieve consistency.[7]

SURVEY RESPONDENTS

The respondents to this survey represent a diverse 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 member through whom they receive DoD benefits, if applicable.

Sixty percent of the survey's respondents had more than one immediate family member affiliated with the military, and 73% were military spouses (i.e., they were married to a

Demographics: Age, Rank, Branch, Service

Age of Respondents

18-24	8%
25-34	34%
35-44	30%
45-54	16%
55-64	8%
65+	5%

Rank of Service

Junior Enlisted (E1-E4)	16%
Senior Enlisted (E5-E9)	49%
Warrant Officer (W1-W5)	3%
Company Grade Officer (O1-O3)	12%
Field Grade Officer (O4-O6)	19%
General Grade Officer (O7-O10)	1%
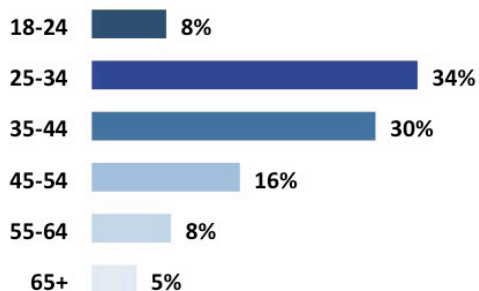
Branch of Service

State Guard	.1%
Public Health	.1%
Air National Guard	1%
Coast Guard	3%
Marine Corps	12%
Air Force	16%
Navy	22%
Army	39%

Service Member Status

Drilling Reserve	1%
Inactive Ready Reserve	1%
Drilling Guard	3%
Reserve	3%
Non-Retired Veteran	4%
Retired Veteran	13%
Active Duty	73%
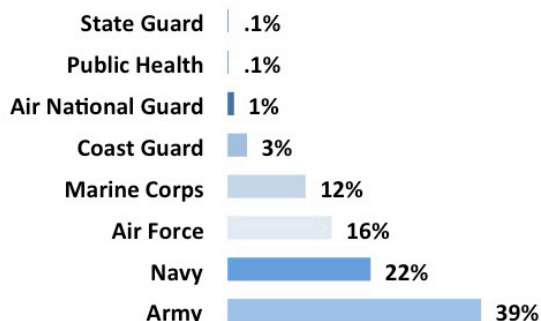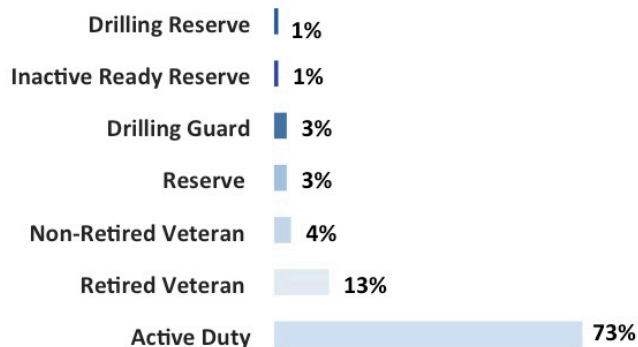
*Due to rounding, percentages add up to more than 100%

service member from any branch of service at the time they took the survey). Sixteen percent of the respondents were service members, 6% were parents, and 4% were children of service members.

Seventy-four percent of the survey respondents were affiliated with active-duty military personnel, 3% percent were affiliated with the Reserve, and 5% with the Drilling Guard, Drilling Reserve, or the Inactive Drilling Guard. Thirteen percent were affiliated with retired veterans, and 4% with non-retired veterans. Sixty-five percent of respondents were affiliated with enlisted service personnel, and 5% of survey respondents resided on overseas military installations. Survey respondents residing in the United States, while fairly evenly distributed across the country, were slightly more concentrated in the Southeast and West.

Eighty-four percent of respondents were female, and 67% of respondents had minor children living at home. Seventeen percent of respondents identified themselves as a minority race or ethnic group. Thirty-eight percent had completed an associate's degree or less, and 30% had completed a bachelor's degree. Sixty-four percent of survey respondents were between the ages of 25 and 44.
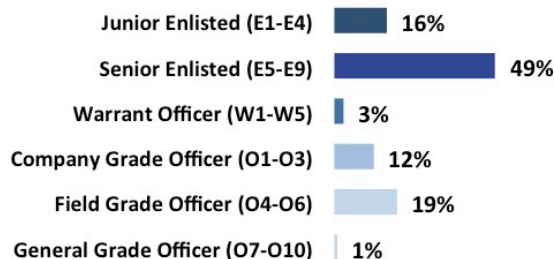
These demographics outline a diverse group of individuals from a variety of backgrounds, drawn together by their commitment to service and the experiences they share of supporting someone in the military.

Demographics: Residency

US and Overseas

Overseas	5%
Other	27%
US	67%

By US Regions

Alaska or Hawaii	3%
Northeast	4%
Mid-Atlantic	9%
Midwest	12%
West	22%
Southeast	40%

By TRICARE Regions

South	26%
West	31%
North	42%
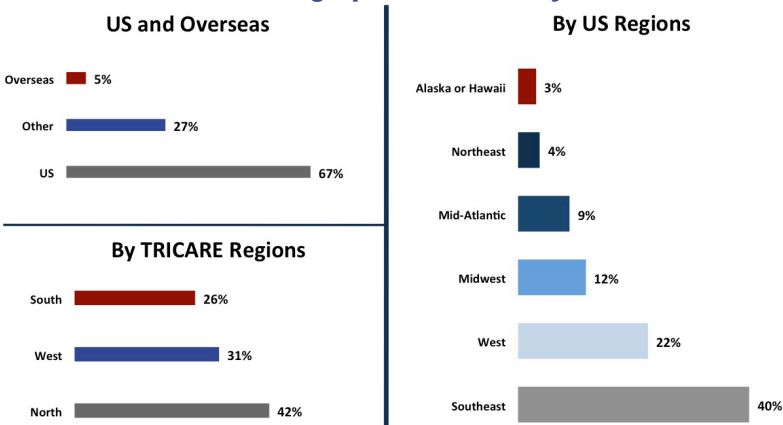
SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

The key concerns identified by more than 5,100 military family members who responded were: pay/benefits, with specific emphasis on changes to retirement benefits, military spouse employment, the effects of deployment on children, and issues surrounding military child education. Additionally, the 2013 survey also uncovered valuable information on the following areas: relationships, suicide prevention, financial literacy, caregiving, communication, and public policy. This year's survey also continued to track how military families support each other, seek out resources, and stay connected to their communities and to their service members.

PAY/BENEFITS AND CHANGES TO RETIREMENT BENEFITS:

Thirty-five percent of respondents listed pay/benefits as their top military family life issue while 22% of respondents cited changes to retirement benefits as their top concern. When veterans were asked about concerns related to separating from the military, their top concerns were employment possibilities and loss of income.

MILITARY SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT:

Sixty-eight percent of spouses reported that being a military spouse had a negative impact on their ability to pursue a career. Of the 61% who were not currently employed, 52% wanted to be. When asked their reasons for not working, 80% mentioned job market alignment. Twenty-three percent of spouses had faced challenges with their state licenses, certifications or other professional qualifications due to military-oriented moves across state lines at some point in their service member's career. Additionally, 26% currently operate their own business.

EFFECTS OF DEPLOYMENT ON MILITARY CHILD EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING AND DEVELOPMENT:

Sixty-seven percent of respondents reported having one or more children currently living at home who were under the age of 18. Of those children, 93% had lived at home during the deployment or routine separation of a military parent. When asked how their children had been affected by the military parent's deployment, anxiety was a predominant response. Thirty percent of respondents sought out mental health counseling services to address the negative emotional impact of deployment. Of those who sought services, 72% found it helpful. Sixty-one percent chose a civilian provider, while only 23% chose a military provider.

Respondents also reported positive aspects of their children's experiences in military life: 73% of respondents noted the adaptability of their children, 68% saw an increase in independence, 67% reported an increase in resilience, and 59% reported an increased sense of pride.

MILITARY CHILD EDUCATION:

Seventy-nine percent reported that their schools engaged in parent/teacher conferences, and 77% reported they were informed of school activities. However, 38% reported that the school was not aware of military life experiences such as transition and deployment and 39% did not feel their school was responsive or proactive to unique military situations. Fifty percent of respondents were unaware of the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children and only 29% of respondents reported that their school adhered to the interstate compact. Forty-seven percent of respondents were not aware of the School Liaison Officer (SLO) program and only 25% reported that their schools were utilizing the Military SLOs. Thirty-three percent reported their school currently utilized peer support programs, and 36% stated that deployment had negatively affected their children's participation in extra-curricular activities.

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS OF NOTE

SOCIAL MEDIA:

Seventy-two percent of respondents indicated that social media was important in communicating with their service member during deploy ment. Facebook became the most popular method of deployment communication in the 2013 survey, surpassing email 85% to 81%. Overall, 88% of respondents used social media to connect with friends or family who did not live near them and 61% used social media to connect to other military families. Additionally, while 61% said their service member's unit used email to disseminate information and 52% said the unit used Facebook, only 37% said they used social media to get updates from the unit. The top three resources for online information-gathering were split between official and non-official sources - Facebook, Military OneSource, and Military.com.

FINANCIAL READINESS AND HEALTH:

Sixty-five percent of respondents said they experienced stress related to their family's current financial condition. The top three obstacles to financial security were: spouse employment (49%), uncertainty in military life (45%), and frequent moves (40%). When asked about financial education within the military community, only 12% of respondents received their financial education through

service member training, while 90% said they wanted greater emphasis on preventative financial education. Eighty-seven percent of respondents used a household budget and 70% had checked their credit report or score in the past 12 months.

PTS/TBI/COMBAT STRESS:

Twenty-three percent of all respondents and 24% of spouse respondents reported PTS symptoms in their service member regardless of diagnosis whereas 19% of service members reported having a PTSD diagnosis and 21% reported symptoms regardless of diagnosis. Of those who reported that their service member had exhibited symptoms of PTS, 57% reported not seeking treatment through a military provider. Five percent of service members reported having been diagnosed with a TBI, and 4% of spouse respondents report their service members had exhibited symptoms of a TBI, regardless of diagnosis.

MILITARY SUICIDE:

Nine percent of military spouses and 18% of service members reported they had "ever considered suicide." Of those who reported having considered suicide, 30% of service members and 23% of spouses report not seeking suicide support services. Thirty-seven percent of respondents felt that the Department of Defense was handling the issue of suicide poorly. Respondents rated the following three topics as "very important" in preventing suicide: 1) counselors who understand the military lifestyle, 2) counselors receiving specialized training in how to work with service members and veterans, and 3) increased availability of mental health services.

VOLUNTEERISM AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT:

Engagement is a strong defining characteristic of the military community. Eighty-seven percent of respondents believed all Americans have a responsibility to participate in national service and 72% supported their service member's continued military service. Ninety-two percent of respondents were registered to vote, and 91% voted in the last presidential election. While 83% expressed satisfaction with the military lifestyle, 23% were enthusiastic promoters of military service, meaning they would recommend joining the military to their child or another young person. Active recommendation of service was captured using the Net Promoter Score methodology, which categories organizational loyalty into three types of people - promoters, passively satisfied, and detractors.

EXCEPTIONAL FAMILY MEMBER PROGRAM (EFMP):

Nineteen percent of respondents had a family member enrolled in the EFMP. The top two supports for families were the chain of command and the local community. Respondents "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that some of the main challenges associated with moving for families with exceptional family members were finding new doctors (68%), obtaining educational accommodations (66%), and access to respite care (66%). Sixty-four percent of respondents reported difficulty accessing community -/ state-based supports such as Medicaid waiver benefits.

PUBLIC POLICY – DON'T ASK DON'T TELL:

For the second year in a row, a majority of respondents felt the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) had no impact on a variety of issues. Seventy-five percent of respondents said it had no impact on their service member's ability to do his/her job and 72% said it had no impact on their service member's desire to re-enlist or stay in the military. Sixty-five percent said it had had no impact on their service member's morale, and 62% said the repeal had no impact on mission readiness or national security. Seventy-one percent said it had had no impact on their desire to attend social functions and 64% of spouses said it had had no impact on their military support group's morale.
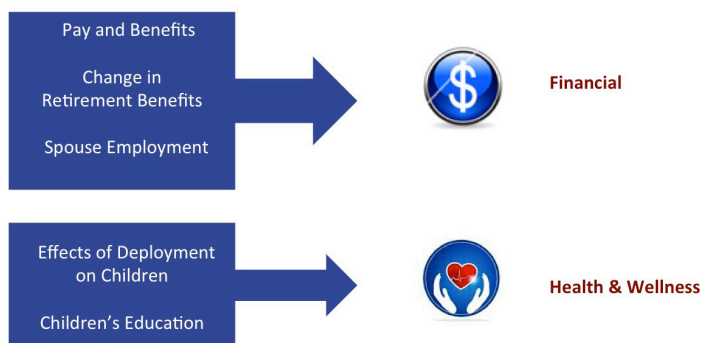
TOP ISSUES FOR MILITARY FAMILIES

Top Military and National Concerns for Families – Driven by Economic Concerns

In 2013, the top three military family issues surround concerns of financial well-being. They are: Military Pay/Benefits (35%), Change in Retirement Benefits (21%), and Spouse Employment Opportunities (19%). While spouse employment affects financial security throughout the service member's career, all three of these issues can be considered key to making a smooth financial transition out of the military. This is particularly noteworthy as estimates point to over one million service members transitioning off of active duty over the next five years. Following these fiscally-oriented concerns, the next two top issues for survey respondents center on the children of service members, specifically the impact of serial deployments (17%) and educational opportunities (16%).

Similar to the general population,[8] financial uncertainty has become an important issue for survey respondents. When assessing the possibility of transitioning from active duty, service members' top concerns were employment possibilities and loss of income. It is important to note that these two concerns have remained the same from 2012 to 2013, regardless of whether the service member had less than or more than twenty years of service. When assessing their top national concerns, the economy and job creation ranked number one and number two, respectively. It is clear that, regardless of time left in service, military members are focused on the state of the economy and concerned about their financial future.

Top Military Family Issues: Common Threads

*Financial and Health & Wellness Concerns
Categorize the Top Military Family Issues*

| Pay and Benefits |
| Change in Retirement Benefits |
| Spouse Employment |

→ **Financial**

| Effects of Deployment on Children |
| Children's Education |

→ **Health & Wellness**

Although both spouses and their active duty partners worry about job creation, concern among spouses exceeded that of service members' by six percentage points. Spouses

also ranked "Spouse Employment Opportunities" second among current top military issues, while it was ranked third by all respondents. With interrupted education and career paths, the ability of spouses to contribute to a steady income stream during military service is often a challenge. Military spouse income contributions after active duty service may also be impacted due to lack of work experience, continuity of work experience, and level of education.

The top five military family concerns help to identify some of the priorities and concerns of military families and shed insight into how policymakers can apply programs and resources towards these goals. It is notable that this year's survey saw, for the first time, Operational Tempo/Deployment drop out of the Top 5 Military Issues. After over a decade of war, the military community has seen a drawdown of the total number of troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, and an increased focus on deployments in the Pacific. These operational trends could be associated with the change in respondents' priorities and may suggest that military families understand the DoD's shift in focus and the need to align resources with national defense needs.

Furthermore, it is important to note that while the necessities of transitioning and adaptability have always been central themes and challenges of the military lifestyle, change is especially imminent inside the military community today and includes budget cuts, sequestration, changes to force structure and pay and benefits, and greater emphasis on the Pacific in addition to the Middle East. These changes, coupled with the unknown, final outcome of sequestration, cause a level of uncertainty with unspecified impact on the military community as well as the nation itself.

Satisfaction with Services

Respondents in the 2013 survey offered insight into their satisfaction levels with specific DoD services. Using a 5-point scale, no service presented averaged above a four. Commissary/Exchange services had the highest average rating of 3.6; chaplain services received a 3.5; MWR received a 3.4; access to health care received a 3.1; and DoDEA received a 3.1. The remaining services received rankings in the 1-2 average, including EFMP, financial counseling, Child Development Services, marital/family counseling, quality of base housing, mental health services, and availability of base housing.

Many services received a "not applicable" answer; EFMP, DoDEA, and Child Development Services were not applicable to more than 50% of respondents. Access to

health care was "not applicable" to only 8% of respondents and Commissary/Exchange was "not applicable" to just 9%, which suggests these services were the most utilized by respondents of this question.

Understanding how individual services factor into satisfaction with overall military experience is an important consideration in light of the budget shifts currently in progress. Understanding all components of service, including effective delivery and relevancy to military families are important factors in determining what changes should be made and what should remain the same. Both negative and positive experiences should be weighed, understanding that incremental changes in delivery, based on user feedback, can make a big difference in increasing satisfaction levels.

Recommendations for DoD Service Satisfaction

- Tailor resources and funding to match the services family members are most likely to utilize focusing on local community-based public/private partnerships

- Leverage informal networks to support formal programs and services

- Ensure that providers at the local level and at multiple points of entry are trained to understand the needs of military families (e.g., chaplains and religious leaders, primary care doctors)

- Involve military families in reviews of programming and services for evaluation of effectiveness, usage, and satisfaction. Proactively provide transparency, context, and rationale for shifts in funding to manage military family expectations and enable contingency planning

- Further review all facets of the military health care experience—including, access to care, quality, and interaction with provider networks—to provide understanding of military families' experiences, use and satisfaction of their military health care benefit across location, branch, and type of insurance plan (e.g., TRICARE Standard, TRICARE Prime), availability of needed services, and barriers to care

FAMILY WELL-BEING

THE MILITARY CHILD

Effects of Deployment on Emotional Well-Being and Development

An entire generation of children was born into and is growing up in a time of war, and we are only beginning to understand the subsequent effects on their development and emotional well-being. For military families, these concerns loom especially large. Of the approximately two million children who have a parent with an active presence in the military, 1.1 million are school-aged.[9] Parents continue to express concerns about their children's long-term emotional well-being and development as a result of their experiences as a military child. However, respondents also cite positive traits they feel their children develop from military family life, including adaptability, independence and resilience.

In this survey, 67% of respondents reported having one or more children, currently living at home, who were under the age of eighteen. Of those children, 93% have lived at home during the deployment or routine separation of a military parent(s). In general, respondents reported that they are able to continue to support their children through deployments and separations; 77% of parents reported high levels of confidence that they are able to set developmentally appropriate routines and responsibilities for their children. However, survey respondents worry about the long-term consequences of the military lifestyle.

"Separation is hard on the relationship that you have with your children. People thank us for our service, thinking about our lives that we risk. The truth is the relationship with our loved ones is what we really risk every day." - *Air Force service member*

Research focused on the impact that the military family lifestyle has on children has continued to increase. The Center for Naval Analysis held its second Military Children Conference, "Promoting Resilience in Military Children through Effective Programs," in November 2012, bringing together expert practitioners and academics to provide frameworks for improving programs for military children and the resilience of those who use them. Additionally, the National Institute of Health recently sent out a call for research to specifically examine the long-term impact of parental military deployment and reintegration on children in military families.[10] While previous research

suggests that most military children are resilient and adapt well to the military lifestyle,[11,12,13] military children can be exposed to life events that are extenuating and consequential, which can put them at risk for psychological and academic concerns.[14,15] Adjustment to deployment can be particularly problematic when it includes multiple deployments, longer deployments, increased stress at home in addition to the deployment, and higher parental stress of the non-deployed parent.[16,17,18]

"I am afraid that he will begin to feel abandoned by his father no matter what measures I take to ensure he feels loved by him while he is deployed." - *Army spouse*

In an open-ended question that explored parents' concerns about raising their children in the military lifestyle, nearly one-third of the respondents noted these same problematic effects on their relationships and also to their ability to parent.

"The stress on the caregiving parent leads to suboptimal parenting, which is going to cause problems for military children for years to come." - *Army spouse*

Children display the psychological effects of deployment and separation in a variety of ways. When asked how their children have been affected by the military parent's deployment, anxiety was the predominant response. Sixty-eight percent of respondents reported that their children had experienced separation anxiety, and 63% of respondents reported that their children worried. Very young children may show this anxiety by clinging to parents, crying more, regressing to previous behaviors, and acting out more. School-aged children may be irritable, distracted, or have trouble sleeping.[19,20]

In this survey, 48% of respondents noted irritability in their children, and 45% of respondents noted that their children had "difficulty sleeping" or "nightmares." Being distracted can affect school performance, and 38% of respondents reported that their children experienced "difficulty concentrating." Thirty-six percent of respondents reported aggressive reactions, and 31% of respondents reported signs of depression in their children. Additionally, school-aged children can be irritable, distracted by worry, or have trouble sleeping.[21,22]

"My youngest daughter freaks out when we are late picking her up. She has had emotional outbreaks at school. She is afraid we are going to leave her." - *Army service member*

Other times, it is the lack of symptoms that can cause parental concern. While research suggests that most military children do not show clinically significant symptoms,[23] there are times when mental health services could be warranted. Thirty percent of respondents sought out mental health counseling services to address the negative emotional impact of deployment. Of those who sought services, 72% found it helpful. Sixty-one percent chose a civilian provider, while 23% chose a military provider. Respondents tend to choose civilian providers for a variety of reasons, such as a concern for privacy, availability and even the location of available military providers. Adding to the difficulty, many military providers do not specialize in working with children and adolescents and thus often refer these families to civilian providers in the community.

"This last PCS with a 6- and 9-year-old has been especially hard since we went from a great school in South Carolina to a less than stellar school here in California. I feel that the educational variables are too wide when it comes to moving from one place to another." - *Marine Corps spouse*

Over the past year, civilian mental health professional organizations have heard the call for additional support for military families, and have answered by offering professional training that emphasizes military cultural competence, including the strains, stressors, and specialties involved in supporting military service.[24,25] Additionally, many university training programs are offering coursework in understanding veterans and military families so providers have the appropriate knowledge before even entering into professional practice.[26]

While parental deployment may have some adverse effects on military children, it is also important to note the positive effects. Seventy-three percent of respondents noted the increased adaptability of their children due to a military parent's deployment.

"I am grateful that they will understand that 'home' can be anywhere—it isn't one building, one place or one kind of experience. I know they will grow up understanding that there is more to the world than one state or county, and that people who are 'strange' or 'different' are no better or worse than anyone else. I am especially grateful that they are being raised in an environment where success is still largely measured by personal accomplishment independent of notions of class, race, gender and ethnicity." - *Army spouse*

Sixty-seven percent of respondents noted an increase in independence in their children, and 65% of respondents reported an increase in resilience as an effect of a parent's deployment. In fact, 59% of respondents reported an increased sense of pride related to experiencing a parent's deployment.

"Our family has been able to know real-life heroes and be humbled by their stories of overcoming injuries or handling the loss of a loved one in combat. We are able to teach our children about self-sacrifice and patriotism first hand." - *Army spouse*
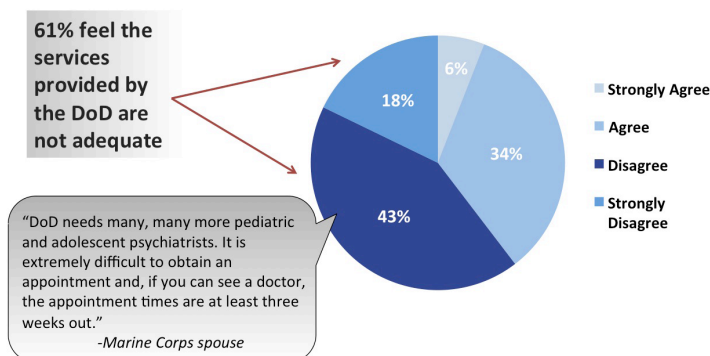

Families that are supported by their communities experience less deployment-related stress.[27,28] However, when asked if they felt the support services provided by the DoD are adequate to support military children in dealing with deployments, 61% of respondents disagreed. In the open-ended responses, parents discussed: (1) the need for additional mental health support services, (2) increased services for those who are living off and away from bases (especially during times of a deployment as an individual augmentee), and (3) greater access to respite care.

"I limit the activities my kids can be involved in during deployments mostly because I get exhausted. If respite care (drop-in day care, etc.) were available and easy to procure, I would be more inclined to keep my children at their normal activity level. I am more than willing to pay for such a service, but there isn't any kind of respite care in my community, and I live near a major military base." - *Army spouse*

Regarding community support, 56% of respondents reported that "the community embraced opportunities to help military families deal with deployments." However, as one Air Force spouse noted, sometimes community members may be hesitant about reaching out: "Long distance is too hard for kids, and often other local families will have reservations about encouraging friendships with our kids because they know we are temporary." Family members said they would like to see continued efforts by the community to embrace opportunities for support. One Navy spouse suggested: "I would love to see churches or other organizations encourage adopting families/ grandparents for the military families who do not have extended families around. Offer occasional dinners together, provide care for date nights AND include the military family in Thanksgiving and/or weekend dinners and celebrations."

Children and Deployment: DoD Support Services

I Feel the Support Services Provided by the Department of Defense are Adequate to Support Military Children in Dealing With Deployments

61% feel the services provided by the DoD are not adequate

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

"DoD needs many, many more pediatric and adolescent psychiatrists. It is extremely difficult to obtain an appointment and, if you can see a doctor, the appointment times are at least three weeks out."
-*Marine Corps spouse*

Recommendations for Children's Emotional Well-being and Development

- Support expanded research efforts to identify specific effects of deployment and adjustment on children, as well as tools that families can use to overcome stressors
- Provide additional programs to support the caregiving parent and increase positive child relationships along the deployment cycle
- Work with professional mental health organizations and higher education programs to provide specific training on understanding military families and enhancing military cultural competence

Education and the Military Child

Like civilian families, military families are concerned about the quality of their children's education, and often find themselves making tough decisions regarding the best placement for their children to achieve academic success. One Army spouse said, "It has been very difficult for my daughters to reintegrate into their new schools, especially when they are not given the credits they have accumulated from their prior schools." In fact, previous research has found that one of the most challenging aspects of relocation is educational disruption.[29]

The quality of education available is an important benchmark when military families make decisions to relocate, consider living separately (known as geographic bachelor situations, or "geo-baching"), or even leave active duty service. One Air Force spouse stated, "I retired from active duty and my spouse is now geographically separated from the family due to his Permanent Change of Station orders (PCS). The impact on the children and family is what ultimately drove my husband to decide to retire from active duty."

In line with the reports by the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA),[30] 58% of survey respondents stated their children attend public schools. While seeking a quality education for their children, military parents also search for schools that recognize and respond to the distinct needs of children of military families.[31] Districts with an average daily attendance that includes ten percent or more of military students can apply to receive Federal Impact Aid funds specifically set aside for schools with high military student populations.[32] Although public school education falls under the jurisdiction of the state government, funding such as the Federal Impact Aid can incentivize school districts to enhance programming and training for teachers to address specific groups such as military-connected children.

"Both schools are very adamant that students fill out the Federal Impact Aid form to get money from the government for military children—but they provide no services." - *Army National Guard spouse*

To this end, DoDEA has offered additional grant opportunities for improving the education of military students and providing professional development for educators to expand their understanding of the day-to-day experiences of the military students they serve." [33] However, given the proposed budget reductions, this funding may be very limited in the future.

When respondents were asked in an open-ended question for examples of anything particularly supportive or unique that their schools were doing, the most common theme was "nothing."

"In fact, I have written the school about participating in Month of the Military Child and other events that recognize the unique group of challenges that our children face. No response. My son petitioned his H.S. to support a club he wanted to start for kids of military members and those that support them called the 'Patriot Club.' No response. I am disappointed to say the least." - *Army spouse*

"I am a member of Blue Star Families so I have helped our school start an Operation Appreciation program. There is nothing at our school for our military kids unless I am telling them to do it. It feels like a losing battle sometimes." - *Coast Guard spouse*

Five percent of respondents stated that they home school their children. Nine percent of respondents reported that their children are in private school, with the highest

percentages among the Army and Navy families. In addition to different levels of quality, varied requirements from state to state can be stressors for military families and their children as students have to repeat content already learned or miss critical topics as they transition from one location to another.[34] Some parents have turned to online resources as a way to have individualized, interactive, and self-paced instruction, and to also have access to courses that might not otherwise be offered in their areas.[35]

The inconsistency in standards is why organizations such as The Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) have advocated for common core standards that outline specific skills and knowledge for students' K-12 to prepare them for college and future employment.[36] Forty-five states and the District of Columbia have adopted the Common Core State Standards: Alaska, Texas, Minnesota, Nebraska, Virginia, and Puerto Rico have not yet adopted these standards.[37] For military families, standards could help reduce educational inconsistencies for students, parents, and teachers as military students relocate to new schools, clarifying expectations at each grade level regardless of location.

"When my husband was deployed, the school my children were attending did nothing and did not recognize the situation at all. This was in a nonmilitary community and it was very disheartening to experience." - *Navy spouse*

DoDEA schools have also adopted the Common Core Standards, which makes it easier for military children to transfer between DoDEA schools. Ten percent of respondents currently have children attending a DoDEA school, which is slightly higher than the actual reported percentage of military children attending DoDEA schools worldwide (7%).[38] Of the 29% of respondents who reported having a child attend a DoDEA school at one time, 95% reported that their children was elementary school age while attending the DoDEA school. Seventy-six percent were satisfied with their DoDEA experience and 71% of respondents believed that their children were prepared to advance to higher grade levels.

"My children have been to schools all over the world, and the DoDEA school system has always been better than any we have experienced on the outside. I applaud the fact that the DoDEA schools keep well-rounded curriculum and expose the children to a lot of different experiences. My kids are always ahead of their peers when we move back to public schools in the States, in fact two of them graduated early because of their years in DoDEA." - *Army spouse*

These sentiments align with researchers who have found that military children attending DoDEA schools compare favorably to civilian children. In particular, children attending DoDEA schools exceeded national averages on science standardized testing during the 2009 school year, and in 2012, reading and writing scores on the SAT test were higher than the national average.[39,40]

In this study, 79% percent of respondents reported that their schools engaged in parent/teacher conferences and 77% believe they were informed of school activities. However, 38% felt that the school was not aware of military life experiences such as transitions and deployments and 39% did not feel that their school was responsive or proactive to unique military situations.

Because many schools do not create student identifiers to track military-affiliated children,[41] currently there is no ability to accurately collect the data that would assist in addressing the specific needs and challenges of these students. In January of 2013, Texas state senators filed legislation to require the Texas Education Agency to create a military identifier in the Public Education Information Management System that could assist in better tracking academic progress.[42] This example of state tracking could be replicated across the country in similar state education systems.

Forty-seven percent of respondents reported that opportunities were given to celebrate and include the military member in the classroom, but many respondents mentioned singular activities surrounding Veteran's Day. Information about military service could be incorporated into school curriculum throughout the school year[43] and would create opportunities for children to share their diverse experiences as members of a military family in assignments and presentations and provide a means to reduce the military-civilian divide.

Sixty-one percent of respondents noted that their school accessed previous school records during school transitions, but 65% reported that they were either unaware or did not believe that their school supported the transfer of credits and access to programming such as Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB). Additionally, 33% of respondents did not feel that the school did a good job creating a smooth transition for their children. While the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children was designed to resolve educational transition issues such as eligibility, graduation, enrollment, and placement for military children, many school districts and parents are still unaware that their states have signed the compact and the provisions that it entails.

In this survey, 50% of respondents were unaware of the Interstate Compact and only 29% of respondents believed that their school adheres to the compact. Although military installations across the country have established a position for school liaison officers to coordinate educational opportunities and provide information to schools about military children, 47% of respondents were not aware of the program and only 25% believed that their schools were utilizing the Military School Liaison Officers.

Establishing school connectivity has been identified as a key factor to support academic achievement for military children,[44] but only 34% of respondents believed that their school currently offers opportunities for connectedness, such as peer support programs. Programs such as MCEC's Student 2 Student and Junior Student 2 Student[45] are examples of ways to sustain peer-based support as children transition in and out of schools. These peer support programs have been shown to be effective in building school connectedness for all children, and can be especially helpful for military children as they transition at a greater frequency than their civilian counterparts.

INTERSTATE COMPACT ON EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

50% Unaware of the Compact

29% Believed Their School Adheres to the Compact

MILITARY SCHOOL LIAISON PROGRAM

47% Unaware of the Program

25% Believed Their School Utilized the Program

Additionally, while 61% of respondents felt that the schools did a good job of providing academic and extracurricular support, 36% of respondents stated that deployment had affected their children's participation. Extracurricular activities are important for keeping students engaged.[46] Communities could help support military families by finding ways to support continued participation while a parent is deployed.

"There needs to be some type of assistance for working spouses to help their kids take advantage of extracurricular activities (sports, etc). There was never enough time in the evening after work to do homework, eat dinner, and attend practice without getting stressed out." - *Army spouse*

- Support national legislation to create a military student identifier; work with local school districts to ensure accurate tracking of military connected students

- Support Common Core Standards at the state level and ensure dissemination at the local district level

- Disseminate specific guidance and provide targeted training on the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children and the school liaison officers to military families and educators. Coordinate a targeted messaging campaign to ensure they are aware of these resources

- Support practical educational research regarding military connected students and disseminate findings; leverage university, and public private partnerships (e.g., Cooperative Extension, Military Child Education Coalition)

- Further review non-traditional options such as charter schools and online learning possibilities that could provide greater flexibility for military students in transition

Exceptional Family Member Program

The Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) offers support for families that have a family member with a medical or an educational need that requires special services. Similar to the 2012 survey, 18% of respondents have a family member enrolled in the EFMP. The top four conditions reported this year include: 46% with a speech or language impairment, 39% with a developmental delay, 36% with autism, and 28% with a specific learning disability.

Navigating the military healthcare system to obtain services can be challenging for caregivers for Exceptional Family Members (EFM). The National Council on Disability[47] noted that it is even harder for young parents, those with more than one exceptional family member, those who themselves are exceptional family members, and those with a deployed service member.

The chain of command and EFMP base support are important resources to assist in addressing potential barriers.[48] Forty-five percent of respondents to this study felt that their families were supported by their chain of command, and 43% felt supported by the base's EFMP.

Forty-five percent of respondents also reported feeling supported by their local communities outside the base. While some families may worry about the potential impact on their career if they enroll in the EFMP, 70% of respondents disagreed that being enrolled in EFMP had negatively impacted their military careers.

Relocations can be particularly challenging for those who have children with special needs.[49] While 72% felt that TRICARE provides appropriate medical care for their families, many respondents reported challenges with access to services during relocations. Sixty-eight percent of respondents struggled with finding new doctors, and 65% reported difficulty in obtaining access to respite care as they relocated. Families may also struggle when trying to obtain recommended specialty services that are not covered by TRICARE, such as applied behavior analysis (ABA) therapy for children with autism. The unreimbursed costs can cause financial hardships for families.[50] One Navy spouse described this challenge for her family when she stated, "He probably would've stayed in if he felt that we would not have to spend so much money out of pocket obtaining speech, occupational, and physical therapy for our son."

"**Moving duty stations requires military families to re-enroll in EFMP program services. This means that children may be waiting for months, often times a year, to access services.**" - *Navy spouse*

If the family is also trying to access state benefits such as Medicaid, the lack of waiver portability becomes a challenge since the EFM will be moved to the bottom of the waitlist every time the family moves to a new state.[51] Sixty-four percent of respondents reported difficulty accessing community/state-based supports, such as Medicaid waiver benefits. In addition, 55% of respondents

31% say that being enrolled in EFMP has had a negative impact on service member's career

with an EFM also reported difficulty finding adequate housing when relocating. Since families often do not know exactly where they will be living when they PCS, families' ability to plan in advance can be significantly inhibited.

Finally navigating the educational system can be challenging for families with special needs children. Sixty-three percent of respondents felt supported by their local school systems. Of those with children in the DoDEA school system, 65% felt supported, while 35% percent did not feel supported. Regardless of how supported they may feel in their current schools, relocation can bring an additional set of challenges. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) describes guidelines for qualification and requires school districts to provide comparable services when a student moves, but the DoD and each state establish their own eligibility criteria.[52] Thus, there is a variety of ways that each school district can fulfill the federal regulations, which can lead to inconsistency as a student moves from state to state or even to a new district.

Much like other military children, special needs students may experience another level of discontinuity or gaps in services when relocating.[53] In the 2012 U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO)[54] report on services for children with special needs, the recommendations included establishing benchmarks and performance goals for the EFM and ensuring that school-aged children are medically and educationally screened before being relocated overseas. Similar to the Military Family Needs Assessment data,[55] 66% of respondents noted that educational accommodations were challenging after relocation. New school districts will honor the previous individualized education program (IEP), but the district has authority to decide how the goals and objectives will be met and it may not be through the same exact program or services.[56] In the absence of outside guidance, parents must do their own research and be strong advocates for their children. In addition to school liaison officers and EFMP case managers, there are a variety of online community networks that can be of assistance such as Military OneSource,[57] Specialized Training of Military Parents (STOMP),[58] and the Wrightslaw website.[59]

EFMP Enrollment

Is Your Family Enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP)?

- 19%
- 13%
- 9%
- 59%
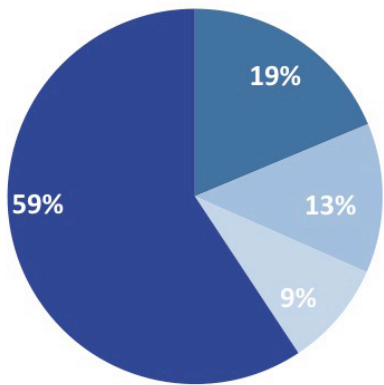
■ Yes
■ No, I am Not Familiar With EFMP
■ No, But I Think our Family Would Qualify
■ No, And I Do Not Think my Family Would Qualify

Speech or language impairment	46%
Developmental Delay	39%
Autism	36%
Physical Disability	31%
Emotional Distuburbance	29%
Specific Learning Disability	28%
Intellectual Disability	11%
Hearing Impairment	10%
Visual impairment, Including Blindness	9%
Traumatic Brain Injury	4%
Deaf-Blindness	2%

CHILDCARE

Military families frequently live apart from family, friends, and familiar neighbors who might otherwise help with childcare responsibilities in the civilian community. Frequent relocation means having to navigate resources in new communities, which may compound difficulties in accessing childcare especially in the absence of local references and trusted resources. For example, military families may require childcare services during PCS moves, while seeking employment or housing, or require temporary childcare to handle household duties or medical appointments in the absence of a deployed service member. Finally, in some cases childcare is needed when caring for a special needs child, an injured or disabled adult, or in other situations where respite care might be beneficial.[60]

Childcare options are particularly relevant to military families because there are high percentages of young children with dual-military parents or parents who are deployed or absent. Their needs are slightly different from the childcare needs of the civilian community. According to the 2011 DoD Demographics Survey, across all military personnel, 35% percent are married to a civilian with children, 2% are dual military with children, and 7% are single with children. Among active duty service members with children, 42% have children between the ages of 0 and 5, and an additional 30% have children between the ages of 6 and 11 years. Five percent of active duty members are single parents, and among Selected Reserve members (which includes Reserve and National Guard Members) 9% are single parents, 33% are married to a civilian with children, and 2% are dual-military with children. Of those children, 29% are between 0-5 and an additional 30% are 6-11 years old.[61]

Existing Childcare Resources for Military Families

The DoD offers installation-based childcare options through Child Development Centers (CDC) located on military installations as well as through certified in-home providers on many installations. CDC childcare is offered for children ranging in age from six weeks to 12 years and is based both on availability and specific requirements (e.g., priority is given to full-time working parents and service members).[62]

However, the majority of military families do not live on military installations.[63] In 2004, in order to facilitate military family use of childcare off of installations, the DoD began a partnership with the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (NACCRRA), which works nationally with state and local childcare agencies to ensure that families in every local community have access to quality, affordable childcare. NACCRRA, through its partnership with the DoD, supports and assists the military across all branches (with the exception of the Coast Guard which receive similar support through a separate childcare subsidy benefit) in finding childcare in their local communities, and allows some families access to respite care, financial support (in the form of a subsidy), and referrals to certified providers.[64]

Finding Childcare and Utilization

Sixty-seven percent of the respondents in this year's survey indicated they used friends and family to locate childcare resources, 26% percent of respondents reported using military child and youth services, 26% reported using local military community resources, and 21% reported using care specific online services (e.g., Care.com, SitterCity). Five percent of this year's respondents reported using the NACCRRA partnership to find childcare.

Of those who report using childcare, only 3% report using full time installation-based childcare at a CDC. Respondents in this year's survey reported that they care for their children full time at a rate of 37%; 14% indicated that they do not require childcare due to attendance at school, and 9% use full time care with a family member. Six percent indicated that they used a private off-installation daycare, 2% reported using a nanny or home-based day care, 3% indicated they used a part time provider, and 5% reported utilizing after school programs. Ten percent utilize care sporadically (defined as less than four times per month).

Satisfaction with Childcare Options, Quality of Childcare, and Access to Childcare

Childcare Options
Responses related to satisfaction with childcare options were notable in that slightly more than one third of respondents (34%) were unsure about their childcare options. Thirty-three percent reported either being "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with "the variety of options for child care services the military provides to you and your family," while 33% were "dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfed."

Childcare Quality
Forty-one percent indicated they were unsure about the quality of military childcare. Twenty-two percent of respondents were "dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied" with the quality of childcare provided by the military and 37% were "satisfied" or "very satisfied." Only a small percentage (3%) of people reported using installation-based childcare and among those, just over one-third reported being satisfied.

Access to Childcare
This year's respondents cited a number of barriers to accessing childcare, both on and off installations. More than half (53%) of respondents who use on-installation childcare indicated that long waiting lists were the top challenges to securing care at installation CDCs. Six percent reported that they applied for NACCRRA and that the wait list was longer than three months. Given these findings, long wait lists could be impacting the decision to use both on-installation and NACCRRA-associated childcare. Respondents also noted difficulties with the registration process (23%) and distance of a facility from their home (21%). One fifth of respondents reported they were unaware of where to go for assistance in finding childcare.

Children and Childcare: Finding Childcare

What Resources Do You Use to Find Childcare?

Resource	Percent
Friends/Family	67%
Military Child and Youth Services	26%
Local Military Community	26%
Care Specific Online Services	21%
Local Parenting Listserv	10%
Other	10%
Agency Partnerships such as NACCRRA	5%
Free Online Listings	4%

What Difficulties Have You Experienced in Accessing Childcare?

Difficulty	Percent
Long waiting lists/dificulty accessing on-base care	53%
Chose not use CDC for other reasons	33%
Difficulties with CDC registration process following PCS	23%
Chose not to use CDC too far from home or work	21%
Unaware of where to go for assistance	20%
Decided to use home-based or private care/CDC wait list was too long	18%
Applied for NACCRRA/wait list >3months	6%

Satisfaction with <u>options</u> of childcare services military provides

- 6% Very Satisfied
- 11% Very Dissatisfied
- 34% Satisfied
- 27% Dissatisfied
- 22% Unsure
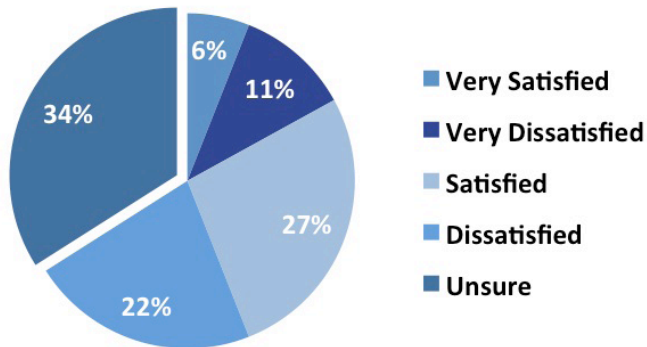
Satisfaction with <u>quality</u> of childcare services military provides

- 10% Very Satisfied
- 8% Very Dissatisfied
- 41% Satisfied
- 27% Dissatisfied
- 14% Unsure
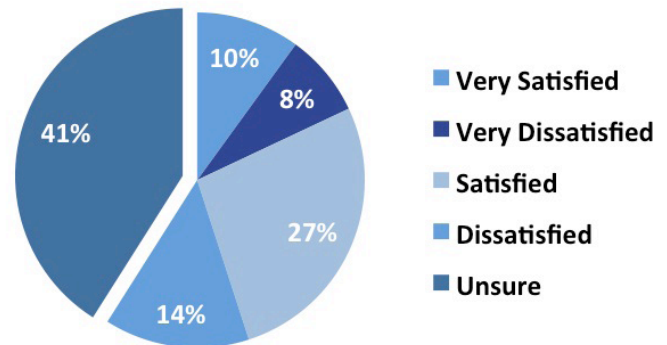
NOTE:
A large percentage of respondents are "unsure" of both their options and the quality of their childcare

Recommendations for Childcare and Looking Ahead

Respondents in this year's survey indicate they most often utilize friends and family when finding childcare; yet with frequent PCS moves, other more sustainable, consistent, and reliable options may be necessary to help families find childcare in new locations. This year's survey data revealed only a small percentage of families utilizing CDC childcare. Consequently, in recent years, the DoD has continued to expand its partnerships with NACCRRA. They have developed new off-base childcare options by funding subsidies to use licensed childcare providers through the Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood program, and through NACCRRA partnerships with both SitterCity and KinderCare, both of which are widely available (note: these benefits are not available to Coast Guard families).[65]

Inconsistency in the way the NACCRRA benefit is administered across branches and lack of awareness about the program may decrease the odds that military families will utilize it. A thorough review of how the NACCRRA program is administered, advertised, and accessed by military families could shed light on how to increase military family awareness of the program and how to more effectively administer the benefit. It could also help to determine whether the barriers mentioned by families are systemic or isolated.

Recommendations for Childcare

- Assess the number of military families needing childcare to determine need for on- and off-base childcare for both full and part time care.
- Continue to expand NACCRRA partnerships with community based childcare resources to improve access, availability and proximity of childcare for military families
- Target messaging to locations where military families are most likely to look (e.g., Child and Youth Services, Military Community Resources) for childcare

CAREGIVING

The physical, emotional, and financial strains of caregiving can be overwhelming without some support. Yet, many military families prefer caring for their loved one, enabling them to remain at home, versus having them receive care elsewhere (e.g. a hospital or rehabilitation center).[66] Thus, some military families find themselves caring for a child or

family member who would otherwise require permanent placement in a facility outside of the home (e.g., a military spouse caring for her wounded service member or for a physically or mentally challenged minor child or elderly parent). Specifically, caregivers commit to providing personal care, emotional support, and advocacy for any period of time during recuperation or rehabilitation or, in the case of more severe injuries, permanently. Their responsibilities vary depending on their specific situation, but may include tasks of daily living (e.g., bathing, eating, mobility, or communication) or managing their loved ones' healthcare needs, including managing medications, attending medical visits, maintaining medical documentation, and advocating for the patient across their continuum of care, to name a few.

"I need help...provide me with the assistance that I need to help my husband!" - *Army spouse, Caregiver*

Recent research from the Pew Research Center suggests that the number of families providing care for more than one generation will continue to increase as the U.S. population ages and Generation X's competing caregiving responsibilities increase.[67] Many military families, in particular, are caregivers for more than one family member (e.g., a spouse caring for a child in the EFMP and also for a wounded warrior, or a military spouse who is simultaneously taking care of an aging parent and a returning service member) and are sometimes referred to as the "sandwich generation."[68] Caregivers to service members face unique challenges. For example, higher levels of child emotional and behavioral difficulties have been reported by

caregivers with a deployed spouse than those reported by parents/caregivers in the general population.[69]

Caregivers for military service members also frequently serve multiple roles: as caregiver of physical and mental trauma, as case manager navigating a complex healthcare system, and as a financial and legal representative while parenting young children and trying to maintain employment outside the home. Among this year's respondents, 12% percent reported they were caregivers to a service member (active duty, reserve, and veterans). A 2013 exploratory study commissioned by the Elizabeth Dole Foundation and conducted by RAND Corporation estimates that there are 275,000 to 1 million men and women who care for and have previously cared for wounded, ill, and injured service members.[70]

"Work with spouses instead of leaving them out of the process. Most of the time it feels like they are working against me and not working with me." - *Navy spouse, Caregiver*

Respite Care

Among this year's respondents, 6% report using some type of respite care that provides short-term, temporary relief from caregiving, minimizing fatigue, one of the primary, immediate consequences of caregiving.[71,72] Previous research has noted that if respite care is used by the caregiver to maintain or develop socially supportive relationships, caregivers are more likely to maintain those relationships after respite care has ended. Accordingly, the

Caregivers and Day-to-Day Stress Levels

Legend:
- Low, I Have no Difficulty Coping
- Manageable, I Can Cope Most of The Time
- High, But I Can Cope
- High, Having Difficulty Coping
- Very High, But I Can Cope
- Very High, Having Difficulty Coping

Not Caregivers: 15%, 36%, 26%, 6%, 14%, 5%

Caregivers: 7%, 23%, 23%, 6%, 27%, 14%

*Due to rounding, percentages add up to more than 100%
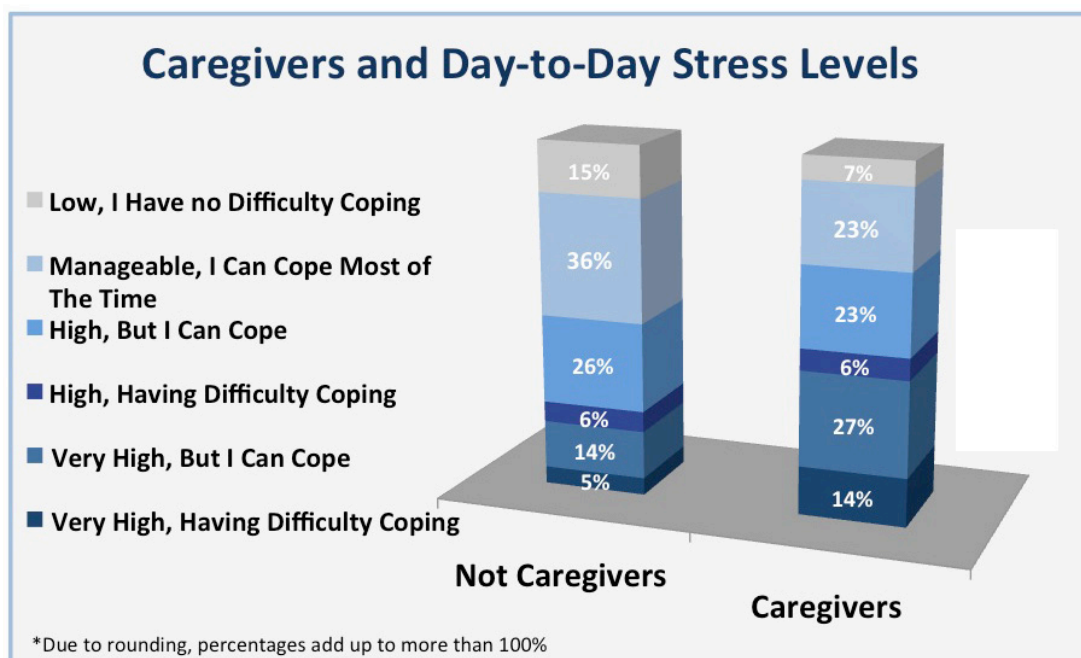
use of respite care may lessen the physical, emotional, and financial burdens of caregiving over the long term.[73]

"Help me find ways to reduce the stress so I don't feel so all over the place." - *Army spouse, Caregiver*

Like their civilian counterparts in the general population,[74] respondents in this year's survey report using respite care for a variety of reasons; the most common reasons were to "regroup and rejuvenate" (76%) and to "run errands" (63%). Other respondents reported using respite care to "build relationships with other members of their family" (63%) and "attend doctor's appointments" (52%). Some additional reasons for using respite care were to allow respondents to "go to special events" (51%), "sleep" (44%), "attend regularly scheduled events for other family members" (26%), "engage in hobbies" (23%), and "obtain higher education" (22%). Finally, 11% of respondents said they made use of respite care to "prevent harm to either themselves or their children." These finding suggests that more information is needed about the exact type of support that is needed by caregivers within the military population. Such information could identify risk factors that might impact the desire to harm oneself or others (including children) and determine how to target caregivers for primary prevention/intervention efforts once those risk factors are identified.

Of the respondents who reported using respite care for a family member, 62% required care for a child and the majority of those (70%) were children with special needs. Seventeen percent of respondents reported using respite care for their aging parents. Sixty-four percent of survey respondents indicated they had used a family member or friend to provide the respite care while, 33% used in-home care with a provider who had training related to their family member's special needs (e.g., either specialized training, a certification, or a LPN/RN). Fifteen percent used respite providers within a care facility.

Caregivers who do not receive regular breaks from caregiving can experience health, social, and financial consequences over time.[75] Seventy percent of caregiver respondents who utilized respite care reported "high" or "very high" day-to-day stress levels as compared to 51% of non-caregivers. Caregivers in this study also reported being under more financial stress than non-caregivers, and seventy-six percent of respondents reported that their personal financial condition caused them "some stress" or a "great deal of stress" as compared to their non-caregiver counterparts (64%). This finding is consistent with recent research that found that 62% of caregivers for veterans

depleted assets and/or accumulated debt, and 41% left the workforce in order to provide care.[76]

Recommendations for Caregiving

- Develop a community-based system of support for caregivers, especially for those in the "sandwich generation," which includes increasing awareness and availability of specific resources directed at providing increased emotional and/or financial support

- Support targeted research and dissemination of results, leveraging public/private partnerships (e.g., University, private foundations, military treatment hospitals) to examine the various impacts of caregiving for service members on their family, relationships, financial, mental health and well-being;

- Leverage research to develop evidence-based training and resources specific to military caregivers

- Utilize research to develop targeted education, training, and awareness for command leadership and family resource groups on the added stressors of caregiving to the military family; include education on how to identify caregivers who might be at risk for harming themselves or others

- Develop caregiving as a specialized area of military spouse employment and entrepreneurship opportunity; provide training and certification similar to home-based childcare

DEPLOYMENTS, WELLNESS, AND DAY-TO-DAY STRESS

Frequent moves, separation from friends and family, worry about the service member's safety, and increased responsibility at home are stress-inducing experiences faced by the majority of military families. Service member deployment is one of the most notable stressors faced by military couples and families.[77] In this survey, military spouses were asked about their day-to-day personal stress level, their stress level during deployment, and their ability to cope during each.

Personal Stress Level During Deployment

Not surprisingly, spouse respondents reported higher stress levels during deployment. Thirty-nine percent reported either "much more" or "somewhat more" (40%) stress than usual and only 16% reported the "same amount" of stress as usual. Less than 5% reported less stress than usual. Thirteen percent of spouse respondents reported low "day-to-day" stress (not during a deployment), as compared to 6% who said they had low stress when their spouse was deployed. Fifty-two percent of spouses said they experienced "high" or "very high" stress even when their spouses were not deployed, but also indicated they were able to cope. Ten percent of spouses who reported "high" or "very high" stress outside of deployment and also indicated they had difficulty coping.
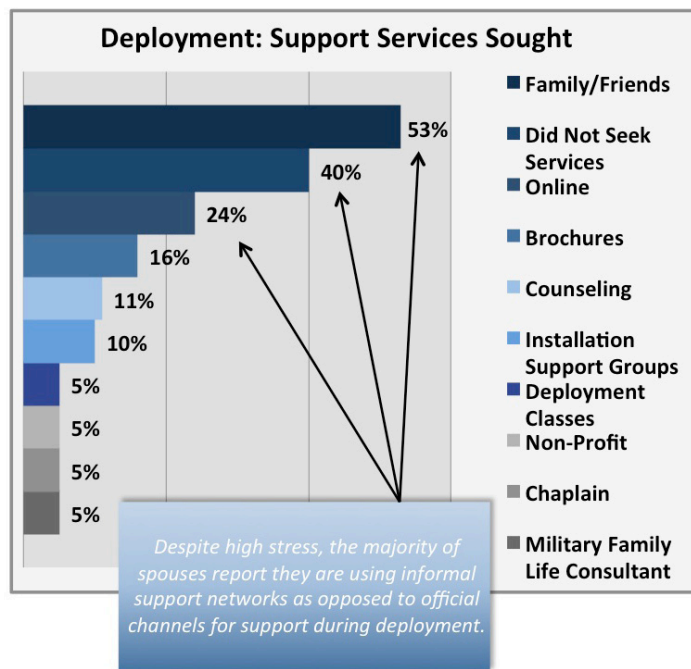
Day-to-Day Stress Level and Coping Ability During Deployment

When spouses were asked about their ability to cope with stress during a deployment, the majority of spouses who reported "high" or "very high" stress (54%) also reported the ability to cope. A smaller group of spouses (15%) reported that they experienced "high" or "very high" stress and reported having difficulty coping, possibly representing a group towards which support and resources could be targeted. Finally, 24% of spouses reported "low/manageable" stress levels and reported being able to cope most of the time, which may represent temporary or intermittent stress, experienced by most people at least some of the time. Overall, spouses reported more stress during deployments, but predominantly reported an ability to cope with that stress.
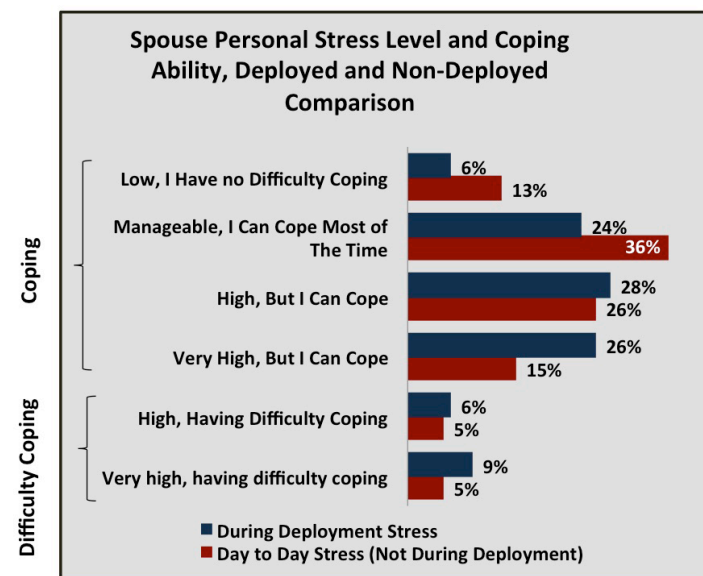
Spouse-Reported Use of Support Services During Deployment

Forty percent of spouse respondents reported not having sought formal support services during their service members' most recent deployment. Overall, spouses' use of support services during deployment is consistent with their reported coping. That is, while spouses report a high level of stress, in general, they also report coping well. Spouses in this study chose informal support services such as family and friends (53%) over official or formal support systems such as installation support groups (10%). Online support forums were used by 24% of the respondents and 16% reported accessing information on dealing with deployment in brochure form. Eleven percent of spouses reported seeking counseling for support during deployment. Installation support groups, deployment classes, non-profit resources, and chaplains were each utilized by 5% or less of the respondents. It is worth mentioning that there are very few resources that focus specifically on the needs of military spouses, and there is a limited amount of research that has focused on their specific needs across the deployment cycle.[78]

Deployment: Support Services Sought

Service	%
Family/Friends	53%
Did Not Seek Services	40%
Online	24%
Brochures	16%
Counseling	11%
Installation Support Groups	10%
Deployment Classes	5%
Non-Profit	5%
Chaplain	5%
Military Family Life Consultant	5%

Despite high stress, the majority of spouses report they are using informal support networks as opposed to official channels for support during deployment.

Spouse Personal Stress Level and Coping Ability, Deployed and Non-Deployed Comparison

Coping

	During Deployment Stress	Day to Day Stress (Not During Deployment)
Low, I Have no Difficulty Coping	6%	13%
Manageable, I Can Cope Most of The Time	24%	36%
High, But I Can Cope	28%	26%
Very High, But I Can Cope	26%	15%

Difficulty Coping

	During Deployment Stress	Day to Day Stress (Not During Deployment)
High, Having Difficulty Coping	6%	5%
Very high, having difficulty coping	9%	5%

■ During Deployment Stress
■ Day to Day Stress (Not During Deployment)

"I wish I understood the Military OneSource referral program better. I thought I was using it to see my preferred counselor but it turns out I wasn't covered and had to pay. I would have rather paid to see the counselor I wanted then get a free service from someone I did not want to see." - *Air Force spouse*

Spouse Relationship and Well-Being

Previous research on marital satisfaction within military couples has drawn inconsistent results, but marital dissatisfaction appears to increase with the number and length of deployments.[79] Yet, despite increasing demands on military families in recent years, rates of marital dissolution appear to be similar to the general population. The DoD's 2011 Demographic report shows that although "all service branches have seen an increase in divorces compared to 2000, the Army has had the greatest increase in percentage of divorces (+1.5%), followed by the Navy (+1.3%)."[80]

Eighty-six percent of respondents in this year's survey reported being "very happy" or "happy" in their relationship. The remaining 14% reported being either "unhappy" or "very unhappy." Sixty-eight percent of respondents reported working out arguments with "little" or "no difficulty" whereas roughly one third (32%) of respondents reported having "some" or "great difficulty" in working out arguments. These numbers support the need for the DoD to continue offering classes and services aimed at improving communication and focusing on healthy relationship behaviors, regardless of where the family is in

Satisfaction With Spousal Relationship

- **86%** reported being very happy or happy

- **14%** reported being unhappy or very unhappy

Working Out Arguments

- **68%** report working out arguments with little or no difficulty

- **32%** report working out arguments with great or some difficulty

the deployment cycle. Currently, marriage retreats, classes, and services are primarily provided by the Chaplain Corps (e.g., Strong Bonds), but several additional family-focused programs have been initiated in recent years to help promote resilience among families. For example, Families Overcoming Stress (FOCUS) is an evidence-based program, administered and developed through University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and offered at multiple military installations for both Marine and Navy families. The program is designed to support and increase resilience and communication within military families.[81]

Service Utilization for Marriage Counseling

There is some evidence that a strong marital relationship has an impact on a service member's decision to seek treatment. Service members appear more likely to seek treatment for posttraumatic stress if they are satisfied within their marital relationship.[82] Thus, there may be hidden benefits for encouraging couples to seek treatment and involving family members in service members' treatment.

Seventy-four percent of respondents reported never having sought marital counseling services. Of those who had sought marital counseling, slightly more respondents reported using a civilian provider (15%) as compared to 11% who reported using a military provider. Satisfaction levels with both military and civilian providers were roughly equivalent, but cannot be directly compared due the variation in the number of respondents in both categories. Across both civilian and military providers, respondents' satisfaction with services was high with almost 73% and 71% reporting being "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their civilian or military provider (respectively), and 27% reported being either "dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied" for both military and civilian providers.

> "There were plenty of resources, but if there was ever a chance it could get back to the company, I wouldn't consider it. I think that most military families have the same mindset. Personal issues are made public through gossip and word of mouth. No one wants their family to be in that position." - Army spouse

> "Counseling will not fix problems regarding the fact that my husband is never home even when he is not deployed." - Army spouse

When respondents were asked about which military resources they used for marital counseling, Military OneSource was cited most often (24%), followed by service-specific Military Support Centers such as Fleet and Family Services or Army Community Services (21%) and chaplains (18%). Military hospitals and clinics were used by 11% of respondents, military treatment facilities (MTF) by 10%, and the Family Assistance Program (FAP) by 6%.

When respondents were asked to cite reasons for not seeking services for marital counseling, the majority (75%) stated that they "did not feel it was necessary." Among both spouses and service members, "spouse refusal/resistance" and "concerns about confidentiality" were the additional top reasons for not seeking marital counseling services and were each cited by 7% of respondents. These reasons are consistent with other research as top barriers to mental health treatment within the military population.[92]

Communication During Deployment

The quality of communication during deployment has been associated with improved family functioning.[83] The frequency of communication has also been examined and there is some indication that the frequency of communication may help improve the at-home spouse's general well-being.[84] For example, a recent study conducted by the REACH program at the University of Arizona found that e-mail was the most frequently used form of communication used by active duty spouses and had the strongest association with general well-being of the at-home spouse.[85] The majority of spouses in this survey report being able to communicate frequently with their spouses during deployments, with 25% reporting that they communicated with their service members daily. Forty percent were in touch with their service members a couple of times a week, and 14% reported communication once a week. Two-percent reported communicating less than once per month.

Military Family Separations for Reasons Other Than Deployment

In addition to deployments, military families experience routine separations throughout the lifecycle of military careers (e.g., training, workups, detachments, unaccompanied tours of duty). In fact, in this survey, deployments accounted for roughly half of the time families spent apart. The other half was related to training, workups, detachments, and other support-oriented activities.

> "As a military spouse getting a master's degree in a specialized field one of my biggest concerns is the inability to stay in one location for more than three years. Even fields that are easily transferable, such as teachers, still have to start from the bottom up every move. I have seen so many spouses quit working due to sheer frustration with the job hunt every six months to three years. The reduced earning power is drastic. We have benefited from our military service, but we will not choose to pursue this lifestyle after his time is up." - Navy spouse

Additionally, while the majority of respondents indicated that they had not chosen to live separately, or "geo-bach," some respondents had chosen to live apart from their spouses for a variety of reasons. The top reason given for "geo-baching" was spouse employment, reported by 17% of respondents. Family support (11%), child (12%) or spouse education (10%), and the inability to sell a home (9%) were other top reasons for living separately. Respondents could offer an open-ended response to this question and provide their own reason for living separately. These responses fell into the following categories: (1) financial/cost of living (2) legal issues that include separation, impending divorce, or custody issues (3) medical care for a family member (4) short or unaccompanied duty tours (5) issues related to status as a domestic partner (e.g., partner could not move with service member due to unrecognized or non-marital status), and (6) issues with citizenship or visas.

Reported Service Branch Support for Military Lifestyle Issues

Respondents were asked to rate their service branch's sensitivity to a variety of key family-related issues including: (1) maintaining contact during deployment (2) awareness of support services (3) preparing families for deployment (4) spouse career and (5) cutting orders around school schedules. The single highest response to this question was related to command sensitivity to spouse employment issues. Fifty-four percent reported that their

commands were "not at all sensitive" to "working with you/ your service member to benefit your spouse's career."

Responses related to "preparing family members for deployment" (27%), and "maintaining contact during deployment" (26%) through service member's command were endorsed as "very sensitive" by the percentages shown in parentheses. No choices were endorsed "very sensitive" by more than 27% of respondents. Differences across branches were not compared due to large variation in sample sizes across responses.

REINTEGRATION

Reintegration Challenges

At the time of this survey, roughly 68,000 troops were deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan. As 2014 approaches, we expect the number of deployed troops to decline, yet the lingering effects of 11 years of war have created notable long-term public health issues.[86] Likewise, proactive contingency planning for service members, veterans and their families will be needed as they transition from military to civilian life and into civilian communities. At the same time, civilian engagement will become critical as military members and their families move away from installations and into predominantly civilian communities. Service members, veterans, and their families who have long-term physical or mental health needs will be uniquely impacted. The transition from active duty status and the possible loss of access to military healthcare and installation services could uniquely impact those service members and family members who are dependent upon regular interventions or therapy.
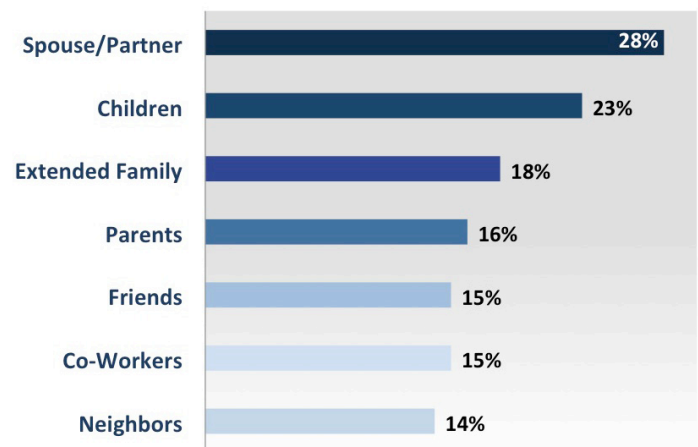
"I think factors in the lives of our military members as well as the families should be taken into consideration. I think there should be monthly check up's for members who come back from deployment for at least 6 months (Longer if needed.) I think the higher up's should be more involved with the members that are going through pre-deployment and make sure the members and their families know of all benefits available during a deployment and if something should go wrong the things that are available to help!" - *Air Force spouse*

When service members were asked to describe their reconnections following their last deployments, they described reconnections with spouse/partner and child as the most difficult of those relationships presented. Reconnection with spouses/partners and children was described as either "very difficult" or "difficult" by 28% and

23% respectively. Conversely, 64% described their reconnections with their spouses/partners as "easy" or "very easy." Fifty percent described their reconnections with their children as "easy" or "very easy."

Respondents reported their reconnections with the following people as "easy" or "very easy": co-workers (71%), friends (70%), extended family (66%), neighbors (61%), and parents (46%). There was very little variation in respondents reporting those same reconnections as "very difficult" or "difficult," ranging from 14% (co-workers) to 18% (friends).

Reconnection Difficulties From Most to Least Difficult

Relationship	Percentage
Spouse/Partner	28%
Children	23%
Extended Family	18%
Parents	16%
Friends	15%
Co-Workers	15%
Neighbors	14%

Service Member Transition Concerns

When asked about the transition from active duty to veteran status, 36% of respondents said the transition was "smooth" and 10% said it was very "smooth." However, more than 50% reported that their transition was "difficult" (35%) or "very difficult" (19%). When asked about using transition resources, 47% reported using family and 46% reported using other military veterans. Other resources included Veteran Service Organizations (29%), G.I. Bill benefits for education (25%), Transition Assistance Program (TAP) classes (25%), and resume writing workshops (15%). When asked about translation of Military Occupational Specialty (MOS), 8% reported that their job designators translated into civilian licenses/ certifications and 14% reported that employers desired their MOS. These findings suggest the need for a closer look at the transition process, including current resources like the Transition GPS programming, and how they are communicated and made available to active duty service members transitioning to veteran status.

Recommendations for Supporting Family Members During Deployment and Reintegration

- Utilize formal support networks (e.g., military commands, installation specific resources) to support informal support networks at the local level where military families tend to seek support
- Identify the specific needs of individual family members separate from their families. In particular, very few services are targeted solely to military spouses independent from their children and service member spouse; engage and encourage specific training in military cultural competence for community based mental health professionals
- Begin to identify "at risk" family members by conducting targeted research on this population
- Leverage university research programs and engage public and private partners to conduct targeted research, and disseminate evidence-based findings to stakeholders in the military community
- Practice primary prevention across the military health system, targeting those who are coping poorly; recognize and identify vulnerable military families and provide timely intervention
- Continue to train civilian mental health providers, ensuring military cultural competence so there is a cadre of trained professionals available to work with military family members regardless of where they reside

BEHAVIORAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

So called "invisible wounds" such as mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI) and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) have become hallmarks of the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) conflicts. They have been the focus of research, programs, and mental health policy for service members, veterans, and their families.[86] For this survey, respondents were asked about TBI and PTSD symptoms as well as the services sought for each. Additionally, respondents were asked about PTS or posttraumatic stress (symptoms related to trauma exposure) and about their own experiences with suicidal thoughts, the services utilized for suicide prevention, the DoD's response to suicide, and their recommendations for improving suicide services within the DoD.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Posttraumatic Stress (PTS)

Mild TBIs (mTBI) are caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or, in the case of a severe TBI, a penetrating head injury, which disrupts the normal function of the brain. Exposure to improvised explosive device (IED) attacks is a common cause of mTBI among OEF and OIF veterans. As of February 2013, the Defense Medical Surveillance System (DMSS) and Theater Medical Data Store (TMDS) showed that there have been a total of 219,921 mTBIs

Suicide

- 18% of service members report having considered suicide
- 9% spouses report having considered suicide
- 30% of service members and 23% of spouses report not seeking suicide support services
- 59% of all respondents know someone personally who has committed suicide or considered committing suicide

PTSD

- 23% of all respondents and 24% of spouses report PTS symptoms in their service member regardless of diagnosis
- 19% of service member report having PTSD diagnosis and 21% having PTS symptoms regardless of diagnosis
- 94% of service members report PTS symptoms are related to military service
- 54% of service members report they have sought treatment for PTS or PTSD through a military provider

TBI

- 5% of service members report a diagnosed TBI
- 4% of spouse respondents report their service member has exhibited symptoms of TBI

PTS and PTSD: Reasons for not Seeking Treatment

Reason	Percentage
Confidentiality/Career Concerns	50%
Spouse Refusal/Resistance	25%
Did Not Need Treatment	24%
Did Not Think Counseling Would Help	24%
Other	16%
Military Cultural Competence	4%
Cost Was Too High	3%
Distance	3%
Cultural Issues/Language Barriers	2%

Confidentiality/career concerns continues to be the top reason reported for not seeking treatment, reported by **50%** of respondents

24% report they "do not think treatment will help"

Consistent with previous research that shows stigma around treatment seeking

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within the DoD worldwide between 2000 and 2012, accounting for 82% of all traumatic brain injuries.[87] Five percent of service members reported having been diagnosed with a TBI, and 4% of spouse respondents report their service members had exhibited symptoms of a TBI, regardless of diagnosis. Previous estimates show a 19% prevalence of mTBI among those deployed in OIF and OIF conflicts.[88]

PTS, or symptoms of trauma, can occur after someone experiences a traumatic event like combat, assault, or disaster, but PTS does not constitute an official psychiatric diagnosis. PTSD is a psychiatric diagnosis and constitutes a specific combination of symptoms lasting for a specific period of time.[89] In this survey, 19% of service members reported having a PTSD diagnosis. When spouses were asked about the symptoms in their service members, just under a quarter of spouse respondents (24%) reported that their service members had displayed symptoms of PTS regardless of diagnosis as compared with 23% or all respondents and 21% of service members who reported they had exhibited PTS symptoms. Previous estimates of PTSD among OIF and OEF service members range from 13% to 20%.[90] Of the respondents who reported that their service members had exhibited symptoms of PTS, 94%

indicated that these symptoms were related to the service members' military service.

Respondents who reported symptoms of PTSD were asked about their use of support services from military and civilian providers. Forty three percent of respondents reported that they or their family had sought intervention or treatment through a military provider for symptoms of PTSD or PTS.

When respondents were asked about their preferences for military or civilian providers for issues related to PTSD, 32% preferred a civilian versus 24% who preferred a military provider. Fourteen percent reported having no preference. One-fifth of respondents (20%) indicated they would prefer a peer who had been through similar experiences in addition to a provider, which supports the DoD and VA efforts to provide peer-based intervention services for persons diagnosed with PTSD.

A recent report released in April 2013, conducted by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) revealed that only an estimated 39% of civilian mental health care providers were accepting new TRICARE patients, compared to an estimated 67% of civilian primary care

providers and an estimated 77% of civilian specialty care providers. This report revealed that civilian providers' awareness and acceptance of TRICARE differs by location type. Specifically, civilian providers in prime service areas, (meaning that they have civilian provider networks) were less aware of TRICARE and less likely to accept new TRICARE patients. Thus, to ensure availability of providers access to care for TRICARE patients, mental health providers may need targeted information about TRICARE focused on increasing awareness and knowledge among mental health providers combined with policies and procedures that encourage them to accept new TRICARE patients for mental health care and minimizing barriers.[91]

Previous research has shown that stigma is one of the top reasons military service members do not seek mental health services.[92] In this survey, among those who reported symptoms of PTS or PTSD and did not seek treatment, 50% cited "confidentiality/career concerns" as a reason for not seeking treatment. Twenty-five percent cited "spouse refusal or resistance," and an additional 24% said they "did not think treatment would help." These same concerns were echoed within open-ended responses about treatment seeking.

Service Member Suicide

In recent years, much has been written about the increasing rate of service member and veteran suicide. A recent RAND study focused on military suicide found that "in 2008, close to 12% of active-duty military personnel reported having seriously considered suicide in the past."[93] Statistics suggest that the rate of suicide within the military has increased steadily since 2008.[94] Recent reports have suggested that the military suicide rate has been as high as one per day, and in 2012, there were 349 reported service members' suicides—a record high.[95]

Several factors consistently appear to relate to suicide in both military and civilian populations. For example, two-thirds of people who have made suicide attempts have a history of depression, one-third have visited a primary care doctor in the ninety days prior to making a suicide attempt, and a large proportion report having had some difficulties with a relationship in the month prior. Access to firearms or other lethal means also appears to be a contributing factor.[96] In this survey, 18% of service members reported having "ever considered committing suicide" and 6% reported that a military family member had considered suicide. Conversely, 76% of service members reported they had not considered suicide.

"The should treat their troops like human beings and not like numbers. Most supervisors don't care about their troops, they are just worried about making rank. The supervisors/leadership should be trained more on knowing the signs of suicide. The stigma of going to mental health should be erased from everyone's mind and should be encouraged for troops to seek help if they need it without reprisal. The leadership needs to treat their younger troops as if they were their own children, not baby them but care about them genuinely,"
*- Air Force spouse*

"I have seen a lot of officers and NCOs who don't take enough time understand what is going on with their soldiers. It's a huge deal when to take the time to understand or try to find out why your soldier is screwing up all the time. I have personally seen time and time again soldiers acting out because of something going on with them and no one taking the time to understand the situation. My husband is only an E5 and I have had several wives thank my husband for cutting their husband some slack and taking the time to understand the situation. Not all soldiers who screw up are bad soldiers sometimes they just need someone to take the time to try and help them." - Army spouse

Respondents were asked "Have you, your service member, or other military family member, to your knowledge, ever considered committing suicide?" Respondents who answered "yes" were then asked to select from a number of options related to support services they, their family members, or service member had used. Responses from service member and military spouses were extracted and compared. For both groups, counseling was the top choice for suicide support, with 36% of service members and 43% of spouse respondents reporting that they had sought counseling. Twenty-four percent and 36% of service members and spouses, respectively, reported relying on family and friends. Conversely, 30% of service members and 23% of spouse respondents reported not seeking services at all. Primary care providers were utilized by both service members (29%) and spouses (20%). Seventeen percent of service members and 19% of military spouses utilized chaplains. Given the reported use of primary care providers and chaplains by both service members and spouses, persons in these roles may play an important "gatekeeping" role in assessing, identifying, and referring suicidal persons to the appropriate support services to the extent they are trained in this role and have the necessary resources available to make timely referrals.

Respondents Rating of DoD Response to Service Member Suicide

- **Poor** — 37%
- **Fair** — 40%
- **Good** — 21%
- **Excellent** — 3%
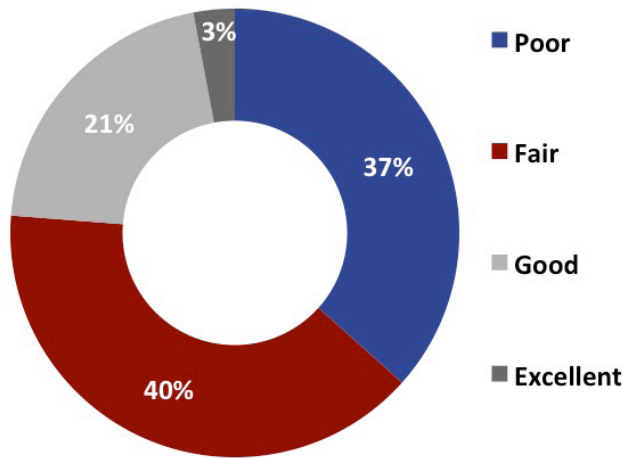
*Due to rounding, percentages add up to more than 100%

Spouse respondents also reported using Military OneSource (12%) and Suicide Hotlines (6%). Seven percent and 11%, respectively, of service members reported using these same resources. Likewise, 7% of service members and 13% of military spouses used online resources. Other resources included as choices were non-profits and military family life consultants, both of which were used by 5% or less of respondents (both service members and spouses).

Respondents were also asked to denote the "helpfulness" of the suicide services they had utilized. Of those respondents who had used services, 70% indicated the services they received were "helpful" and the remaining 22% described the services they received as "unhelpful." Likewise, respondents were asked to rate the DoD on "How is the DoD handling the issue of service member suicide?" Three percent of respondents rated the DoD's response as "excellent," and 37% rated it as "poor." The largest portion (40%) rated the DoD's handling of the issue of service member suicide as "fair."

Military Family Suicide

In this survey, 9% of spouses reported they themselves had considered suicide, while 85% reported they had not. Whereas much attention has been paid to the service member and veteran suicide rate in recent years, relatively little attention has been given to suicidal risk or behavior

among military family members.[85] Known risk factors related to suicide within the civilian population include depression and substance abuse as well as other factors like limited social support, isolation from friends and family, barriers to accessing mental health treatment, and cultural norms that discourage seeking treatment for mental health care.[97] Specific risk factors that predict suicide among military family members are not yet known. However, prior research has suggested that mental health diagnoses (e.g., depression) for military spouses increase during deployments.[98]

> **"Improve Behavioral Healthcare - both access and quality. I am a spouse and I can only speak to the behavioral health care available to family members. If it is at all representative of what service members are getting, it is no wonder that it is ineffective. Wait times for appointments are long. Providers come and go compromising continuity of care. The receptionist staff has the same general attitude that I've found prevalent on military installations -- similar to your typical airline gate agent -- condescending and dismissive. Shouldn't they have some sort of sensitivity training to deal with people in crisis?"** – *Army spouse*

After the release of the 2012 data, **Blue Star Families** recommended that the DoD begin to track military spouse suicide. More recently, the NMFA released its legislative agenda for 2013 and echoed this recommendation: "Mandate tracking and reporting on military family member suicides. Anecdotal reports indicate the number of military family suicides is growing. We cannot address the problem until we know its extent."[99] To our knowledge, at the time of this report, no mechanism has been established within the DoD to track military family member suicide. Based on the 2012 and 2013 survey findings, which show respondents reported suicidal ideation at 10% and 9% respectively, we again recommend that military family suicide be monitored and tracked, thus enabling a more comprehensive examination of the problem, identification of primary prevention needs, and targeted resource allocation.

Recommendations for Suicide Prevention

- Engage and encourage family involvement (including spouse, partner, siblings, parents) when a service member or a military family member is in distress

- Begin tracking suicides among military families to establish a baseline and identify the scope of the problem. A lack of data for the number of military family suicides limits the DoD's ability to understand and prevent the occurrence or appropriately allocate resources

- Ensure that primary care providers, command points of contact for families, clergy, and traditional mental health professionals are trained to identify and refer for suicidality both among service members and military family members

- Ensure that service members, veterans, and military families have seamless access to mental health care (e.g., there are providers trained to work with military families and there are resources for child-care); minimize barriers to accessing care (e.g., wait lists, referrals, inconvenient appointment times)

- Provide targeted training to civilian providers about the TRICARE system and ensure the availability of qualified civilian mental health providers

FINANCIAL READINESS AND THE FUTURE

Service in the armed forces frequently presents unique financial challenges that can adversely impact long-term financial status, military careers, security clearances, and life after service financial issues are among the top concerns of military service members and their families.[100] The top three obstacles to financial security as identified by respondents in this study were: spouse employment (49%), uncertainty in military life (45%), and frequent moves (40%). Sixty-five percent of respondents said they experienced stress related to their families' current financial condition. This is of particular importance within the military community because workplaces already have heightened stress-inducing aspects, and high stress levels can, in some cases, have a negative impact on overall psychological well-being, workplace productivity and performance.[101]

FINANCIAL EDUCATION

Financial education and counseling in the workplace can reduce personal financial stress, which, in turn, has been shown to increase workplace productivity and performance.[102] Recent studies have shown that financial education is beneficial for household decision-making and is correlated with successful retirement.[103,104] However, only 12% of respondents indicated that their financial education was provided through service member training. And, while 47% of respondents said their units support financial readiness through educational programs, 90% said a greater focus should be put on preventive financial education. Fifty-four percent knew how to access financial resources within their units and 82% of service members agreed that their spouses should be included in financial readiness courses.
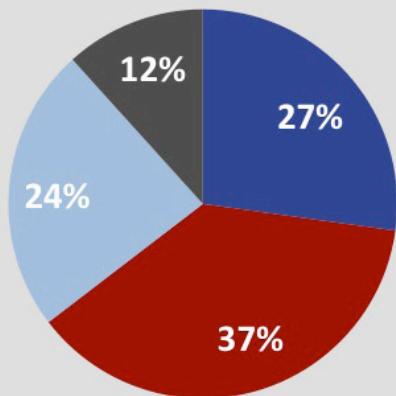
In 2003, the DoD formed a Financial Readiness Campaign whose mission is to provide financial education, resources, programs, and support to service members and their families. Non-profit organizations such as the Better Business Bureau, the Institute of Consumer Financial Education (ICFE), and the FINRA Foundation have partnered with the DoD to offer financial education programs specifically for service members. Offering additional preventive financial education within commands for both service members and their spouses appears to be a way to improve financial literacy among military families.

FINANCIAL HEALTH

Despite uncertainty in the military lifestyle and the frequent impact on financial readiness, military families exhibit positive financial behaviors as compared to the general population.[105,106] Eighty-seven percent of respondents report using a household budget, and 70% say they have checked their credit reports or scores in the past twelve months. Forty-four percent report they have only two to three credit cards, and 63% owe less than $5,000 in credit card debt. Twenty-one percent of respondents owe nothing at all. Forty-nine percent have emergency funds set aside to cover expenses for three months in case of sickness, job loss, economic downturn or other emergencies.[107]
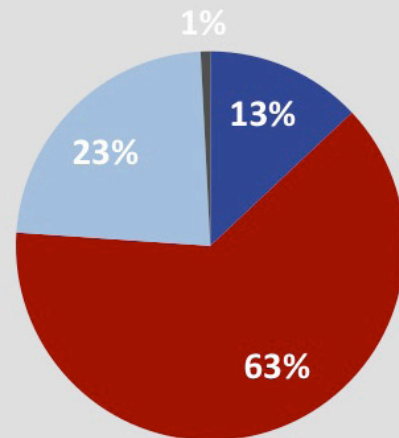
Seventy-four percent of respondents participated in the Servicemens' Group Life Insurance (SGLI) program offered through DoD with coverage of $400,000, and 55% of respondents report not carrying additional life insurance for the service member. Forty percent of respondents report that they carry renters' insurance, and 52% carry

Stress of Family's Current Personal Financial Condition

(pie chart)
- 27% — A Great Deal of Stress
- 37% — Some Stress
- 24% — Not Very Much Stress
- 12% — No Stress at All

Legend:
- A Great Deal of Stress
- Some Stress
- Not Very Much Stress
- No Stress at All

Using a Budget

(pie chart)
- 13% — Do Not Have a Budget
- 63% — Follow a Budget Loosely
- 23% — Follow a Budget Strictly
- 1% — Don't know

Legend:
- Do Not Have a Budget
- Follow a Budget Loosely
- Follow a Budget Strictly
- Don't know

homeowners' insurance. Fifty-four percent of families carry spouse and/or dependent life insurance. Only 9% of respondents carry spouse disability or long-term care insurance.

Although 87% of military families use some vehicle for retirement savings, the act of saving for retirement appears to be challenging. Of those who do save for retirement, 44% use the Thrift Savings Plan and 31% had an Individual Retirement Account (IRA). Military spouses are saving at a lower rate than the general population and less than service members: only 7% have saved for retirement through a military spouse's 401(K) and 5% saved for retirement through a military spouse's defined benefit plan or pension. Thirty-nine percent of respondents said spouse unemployment prevented them from saving for retirement, and 13% said frequent moves prevented them from saving for retirement.

Of those who report not having a retirement savings plan, 60% said they do not make enough to save for the future. According to Deloitte's Retirement Survey, a majority of Americans (58%) do not have a formal retirement savings and income plan in place.[108]

HOME OWNERSHIP

Overall, approximately 65-70% of service members live in off-installation housing.[109] In this survey, of those who lived off-installation, 50% of respondents own a home, 41% own their primary residences, and 9% currently lease their homes to tenants. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in the 4th quarter of 2012, the home ownership rate nationwide was 69%.[110] Of those military members or families who own a home, 70% felt they were in good shape with their mortgages, whereas 19% owed more than the current value of the home. Twenty-four percent rent their primary residences and 19% of respondents live in on-installation housing. Of those who rent, 40% cite frequent relocations as the number one reason for not owning a home, while only 13% cite the uncertainty in real estate as the primary reason for not owning a home. Fourteen percent cited the prohibitive costs of housing near their current duty stations and 11% said their financial situations prevented them from qualifying for a mortgage.

The Military House Privatization Initiative (MHPI) is a public/private program where private sector developers may own, operate, maintain, improve, and assume responsibility

for military family housing and has developed as a cost saving solution to several problems concerning housing for service members and their families.[111] In this survey, 53% of respondents were aware of the program and 44% said they were "very likely" to consider privatized housing during their next PCS.[112] Forty-nine percent said the quality of privatized housing was "good or "excellent" when compared to traditional housing.

Nine percent of respondents who are homeowners have taken advantage of federal programs designed to help with underwater mortgages or refinancing. Seventy-nine percent of those who sought mortgage relief did so through the Home Affordable Refinance Program (HARP), Home Assistance Program (HAP), and simplified refinancing.

Underwater mortgages still appear to be an important concern for military families even though the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) has been working to address hardship assistance programs. In 2012, the CFPB provided guidance to mortgage servicers regarding military homeowners with PCS orders. The results in this study support its guidance that the general uncertainty in the military lifestyle, frequent moves, and military spouse employment challenges are the primary obstacles to financial security in military families. However, these unique circumstances do not release military families from their financial obligations. Mortgage servicers are expected
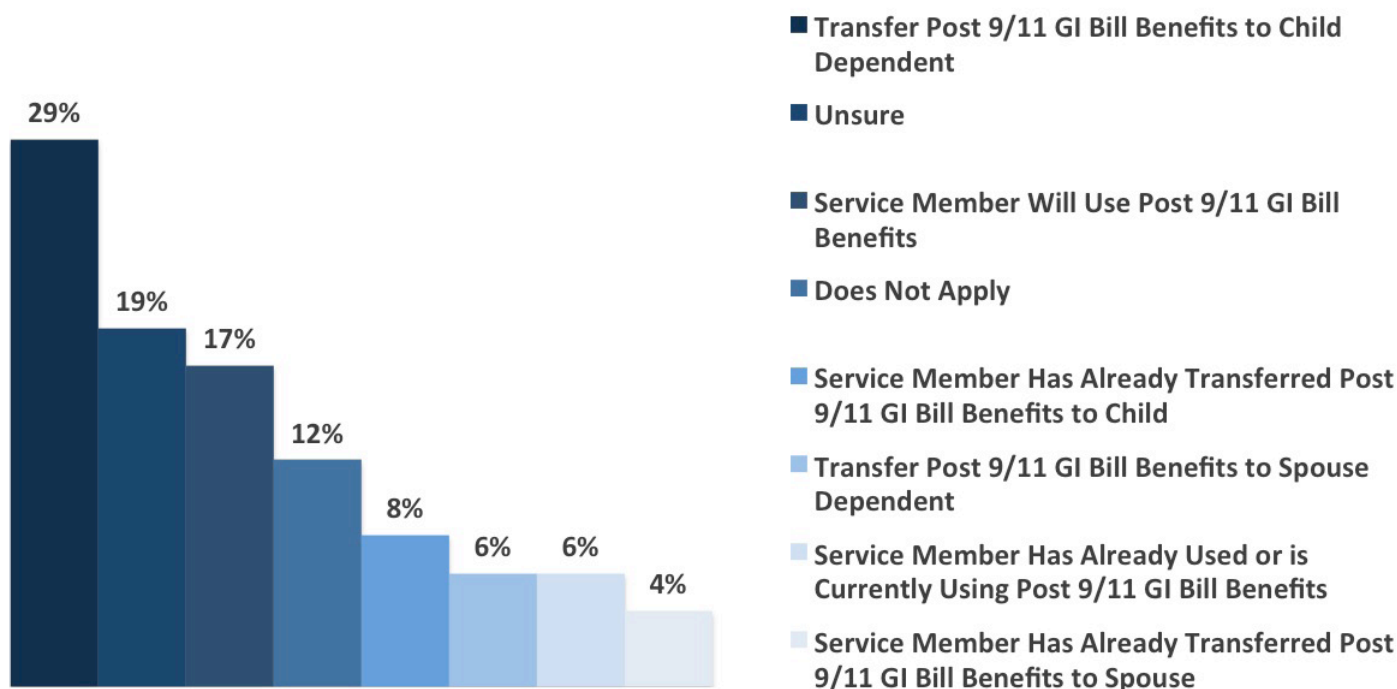
to comply with military homeowners' requests for assistance and not engage in deceptive and fraudulent practices.

USE AND CONFIDENCE IN BENEFITS

According to the VA, spouses and children of service members currently comprise one-fourth of Post-9/11 G.I. Bill users.[113] Use of the education benefits by spouses (an increase of 70%) and children (an increase of 13%) is growing at a faster rate than service members and veterans (an increase of 13%).[114]

In this survey, when asked about plans for the use of Post 9/11 G.I. Bill benefits, 29% of service members planned to transfer them to a spouse or dependent child; 6% percent had already used or were currently using the education benefits for the service member; and 17% of service members planned to use them in the future. At the time of the survey, 12% of service members had already transferred their education benefits to their spouse or dependent child. These results support a corollary finding of this survey - that saving for college is difficult for many military families (27%). The ability to transfer educational benefits to a spouse or dependent may be a strategy military families are using to help pay for college expenses in the face of other financial obstacles.

What Do You Plan to do With Your G.I. Bill Benefits?

29%
19%
17%
12%
8%
6%
6%
4%

- Transfer Post 9/11 GI Bill Benefits to Child Dependent
- Unsure
- Service Member Will Use Post 9/11 GI Bill Benefits
- Does Not Apply
- Service Member Has Already Transferred Post 9/11 GI Bill Benefits to Child
- Transfer Post 9/11 GI Bill Benefits to Spouse Dependent
- Service Member Has Already Used or is Currently Using Post 9/11 GI Bill Benefits
- Service Member Has Already Transferred Post 9/11 GI Bill Benefits to Spouse

*Due to rounding, percentages add up to more than 100%

In April 2013, the Army Times reported that service members will now incur, across the board, an additional four-year service obligation if they request to transfer their Post-9/11 G.I. benefits on or after August 1, 2013 to a dependent.[115] With these changes quickly approaching, it is important that service members and their families are aware of the consequences and impact of transferring these benefits through proactive outreach and transparency through their military leadership.

Lastly, respondents were only somewhat confident that their pay and benefits (34%), education benefits (33%), and the healthcare benefits (31%) would be available for use when they need them. These results echo last year's findings that showed uncertainty in access to previously earned healthcare benefits was one of the top concerns service members had about transitioning out of the service.

### Recommendations for Financial Readiness

- Encourage greater emphasis at the command level for preventive financial education opportunities for military families. In particular, ensure there are opportunities for military spouses to be included in these discussions for added benefit

- Expand awareness of the new Office of Service Members' Affairs at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and its programming designed to help service members and their families

- Develop community-based initiatives to provide unbiased financial education and prevention programs to military families

SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT

Military spouse employment is a key contributor to families' overall satisfaction with their military lifestyle.[116] Prior research indicates that spousal satisfaction with the military lifestyle is a significant predictor of service member retention.[117] **Blue Star Families**' survey respondents have consistently identified military spouse employment challenges as a top concern. This year's survey results align with findings from other research conducted by RAND and DoD where, "The available evidence is remarkably consistent in finding that the majority of military spouses are employed, although they have difficulty finding jobs; employment is correlated with satisfaction with a military lifestyle, although military

spouses have lower wages and work fewer hours than comparable civilian peers."[118] RAND has also consistently found that, "spouse employment is an essential source of income for most military families."[119] Spousal employment is a central concern to military families in maintaining financial wellness and to DoD in achieving readiness and retention goals.

In this survey, 68% of spouse respondents reported that being a military spouse had a negative impact on their ability to pursue a career; only 8% thought it had a positive impact. These numbers are consistent with RAND's findings within their military spouse employment research.[120] Additionally, other research indicates that military spouses will "settle for lower-paying, less desirable work early on" rather than continuing to search for more suitable jobs because of their limited time in each employment market and because employers may perceive them as migratory and be hesitant to hire them.[121] In this survey, 58% of spouse respondents felt they had not gotten a job or they had been treated differently in the workplace because of their military spouse status. Interestingly, 7% of spouses reported that being a military spouse had helped them with recent job applications, suggesting there is potential to increase military spouse hiring via campaigns that raise employers' awareness of military spouse strengths and attributes.

Employment By Sector

29% Public
19% Non-profit
52% Private

Public   Non-profit   Private
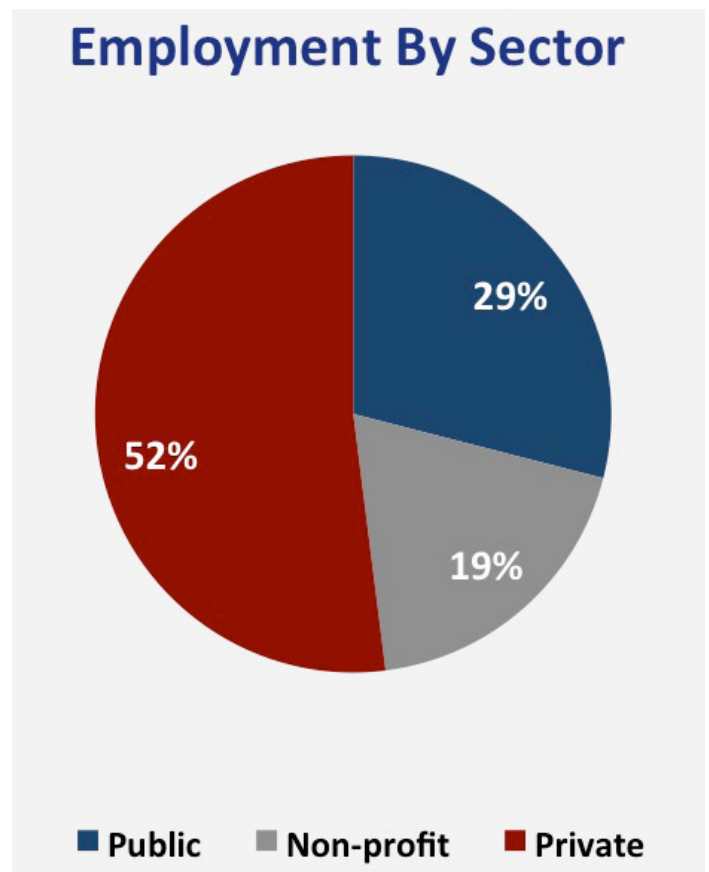
Of the 61% of military spouses who were not currently employed, more than 52% want to work and an additional 21% were unsure, suggesting the continued need for support and policies that lower the barriers to military spouse employment. Despite challenges with job market alignment and the impact of the military lifestyle on their careers, 39% of military spouses are employed outside the home. Spouses employed outside of the home work across industries: 19% work in the non-profit sector, 29% work in the public sector (government or other public agencies) and 52% work in the private sector.

"Working can be very frustrating as a spouse. I have turned down numerous promotions due to PCSs. It's impossible to move up; I'm constantly starting at the bottom when I look for employment. My passed-up promotions can't go on my resume." - *Air Force spouse*

Reasons for Not Working

Military spouses experience some of the same career challenges as their civilian counterparts, but they also face additional obstacles to pursuing employment that are specific to the military lifestyle.[122] Among the civilian workforce, decisions about where to work and live tend to be based on maximizing economic advantage or maintaining existing personal networks. In contrast, military spouses frequently relocate to duty locations with variable economies that may not host opportunities that align with their education and skills. Moreover, research indicates that employers may have negative associations of military spouses as employees, perceiving them as temporary due to frequent moves or unreliable due to service member deployments that require changes in work status to accommodate the needs of the military family.[123]

Spouses indicated that job market alignment is the biggest hurdle to consistent employment and career growth. Eighty percent of spouses reported that they are currently not working due to poor alignment with the local job market, meaning they are either over or under qualified for employment in their current geographic areas or they have expertise in a field that is not relevant to the economy at the current duty station. Additionally, military spouses in overseas locations are often prohibited from formal employment as a result of Status of Forces agreements between the U.S. military and foreign governments. Twenty-eight percent of spouse respondents were not currently working because of a PCS and 16% cited challenges with transferring professional licenses or certifications to a new state.

Overall, throughout their military affiliation, 22% of spouse respondents have encountered employment challenges arising from licensure or certification requirements. Of the spouses who have experienced challenges, 13% had not yet seen improvement in licensure portability despite living in one of 23 states that had passed a "Military Spouse Portability" law (At the time the survey was given, 23 states had passed legislation or an executive order aimed at reducing difficulties for military spouses serving in professions with state license and certification requirements).[124] An additional 16% were living in states that had not passed the legislation, and 8% reported improved employment outcomes due to their current states' adoption of Military Spouse Portability initiatives.

Childcare and Spouse Employment

Fifty-three percent of spouse respondents indicated that finding and paying for quality childcare was a reason for not working. While childcare challenges are also frequently cited as an obstacle to civilian employment, the long, unpredictable work hours and frequent deployments required of service members make childcare an especially significant challenge to military spouse employment.

Although on-base childcare initiatives have grown in recent years, survey results indicate that growth has not kept up with demand. Among respondents citing childcare as a reason for not working, 34% identified childcare as too expensive and 11% reported an inability to locate suitable childcare. Furthermore, the array of regulations and requirements imposed by military base childcare units (e.g., complicated waiting list policies) is a barrier to accessing childcare. One frequently cited childcare challenge impacting spouse employment is that access to on-base childcare is dependent on a spouse's employment status, yet spouses are unable to obtain jobs without first having access to reliable childcare.

Among the broader population, utilization of childcare is tied to employment status, age of children, affordability, and perception of availability of quality childcare options.[125] Thus, when childcare is unavailable, unaffordable, inaccessible, or childcare options are unknown, spouses fail to see employment as a viable option. The survey results suggest that spouse employment outcomes are likely to improve should childcare options be accessible for currently unemployed spouses.

Military Spouse Entrepreneurship

Self-employment has several characteristics that make it attractive to military spouses. Some spouses prefer self-employment because it allows them to manage their workload in accordance with their service members' demanding schedule. Additionally, options to work virtually and without geographic restrictions are increasing for military spouses, thus enabling them to remain employed despite frequent interstate or overseas relocations. Military spouses operate a wide range of businesses, and the number of entrepreneurial initiatives and the breadth of businesses is likely to increase in the future.

Several veteran and service member initiatives, including the Small Business Administration (Patriot Express Loans), American Corporate Partners, Florida State University, Syracuse University, and other entrepreneurial "boot camps," focus on providing resources to transitioning service members to help them engage in successful entrepreneurship. These types of resources and services have only recently begun including military spouses such as Inc. Magazine's Military Entrepreneurs Program, Hiring Our Heroes' Military Spouse Business Alliance, and the Kaufmann Foundation's FastTrack.

Twenty-six percent of spouse respondents in this survey have either been self-employed or have operated their own businesses. An additional 35% are interested in pursuing self-employment or their own businesses, while another 20% are unsure. These survey responses suggest significant opportunities to expand military spouse employment by expanding spouses' access to entrepreneurship training initiatives such as those open to transitioning service members.

Military Spouse Employment Resources

The resources to support military spouse employment are currently growing; these resources include official DoD initiatives, non-profits, and private sector ventures. However, survey responses indicate that military spouses remain unaware of many employment assistance programs. For example, only 30% of respondents were familiar with the Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP), housed within the Department of Defense's Office of Military Family and Community Policy. Twenty-eight percent were aware of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's "Hiring our Heroes" initiative, now in its second year. Forty percent of respondents were aware of at least one branch-specific spouse-oriented employment resource.

The survey results suggest that while no one military spouse employment program is likely to comprehensively address all challenges to spouse employment, they do appear to be of help to a substantial portion of the spouse community and especially to those actively seeking employment. Promoting the current spouse employment resources that help identify "virtual" work opportunities would address the primary challenges faced by spouses whose skills are not aligned to their local job markets, including those spouses who are living overseas and those experiencing frequent geographic relocations.

The survey responses also indicate that successful military spouse employment initiatives incorporate and leverage the experiences of military spouses, rather than attempting to fit military spouses' unique lives into traditional employment programming. For example, 55% percent of respondents cite volunteer experience on their resumes as relevant to their professional skills. Initiatives that translate the current attributes and experiences of military spouses, such as volunteering and resiliency, into marketable skills are more likely to increase spouse employment.

The survey results also suggest that spouses do not perceive support for their careers from the DoD. When asked about sensitivity to spouses' careers, across branches, 54% reported that their branch was "not at all sensitive" to working with a service member to support a spouse's career. However, 14% reported that their branch was "very sensitive." Further, when asked about living separately as a result of a PCS for voluntary reasons ("geo-baching"), spouse career was the top reason, cited by 17% of respondents. This suggests an opportunity for service branches to improve both service member and spouse satisfaction with the military lifestyle by increasing support for military spouse careers and employment programming.

Recommendations for Military Spouse Employment

- Identify programs and corporate partners who are interested in having "virtual" employees so that geography and frequent relocation do not limit spouse career progression

- Support military spouse businesses by incentivizing existing DoD employees and customers (including AAFES, major contractors, and procurement personnel) to include spouse small businesses

- Continue to lobby states to pass and implement the Military Spouse Portability Licensing Act

MILITARY-CIVILIAN INTERSECTIONS AND CONNECTEDNESS

MILITARY FAMILY COMMUNICATION

Social Media Use and Military Family Communication

Military families continue to use social media with high frequency, and more so than civilians.[126] Social media is used by military families to connect to their service member and to one another, as well as to seek out information and resources. Ninety percent of respondents aged 18 to 54 use social media, compared with less than 90% for the same civilian age group.[127] Additionally, military families use Facebook considerably more than their civilian counterparts, at 96% versus 67% respetively.[128] LinkedIn use is also higher, (32%) among military families compared to 20% among civilians.[129]

When broken down by age, 63% of 18 to 24 year old respondents indicated social media is "very important," compared with 47% of 25 to 34 year olds, 52% of 35 to 45
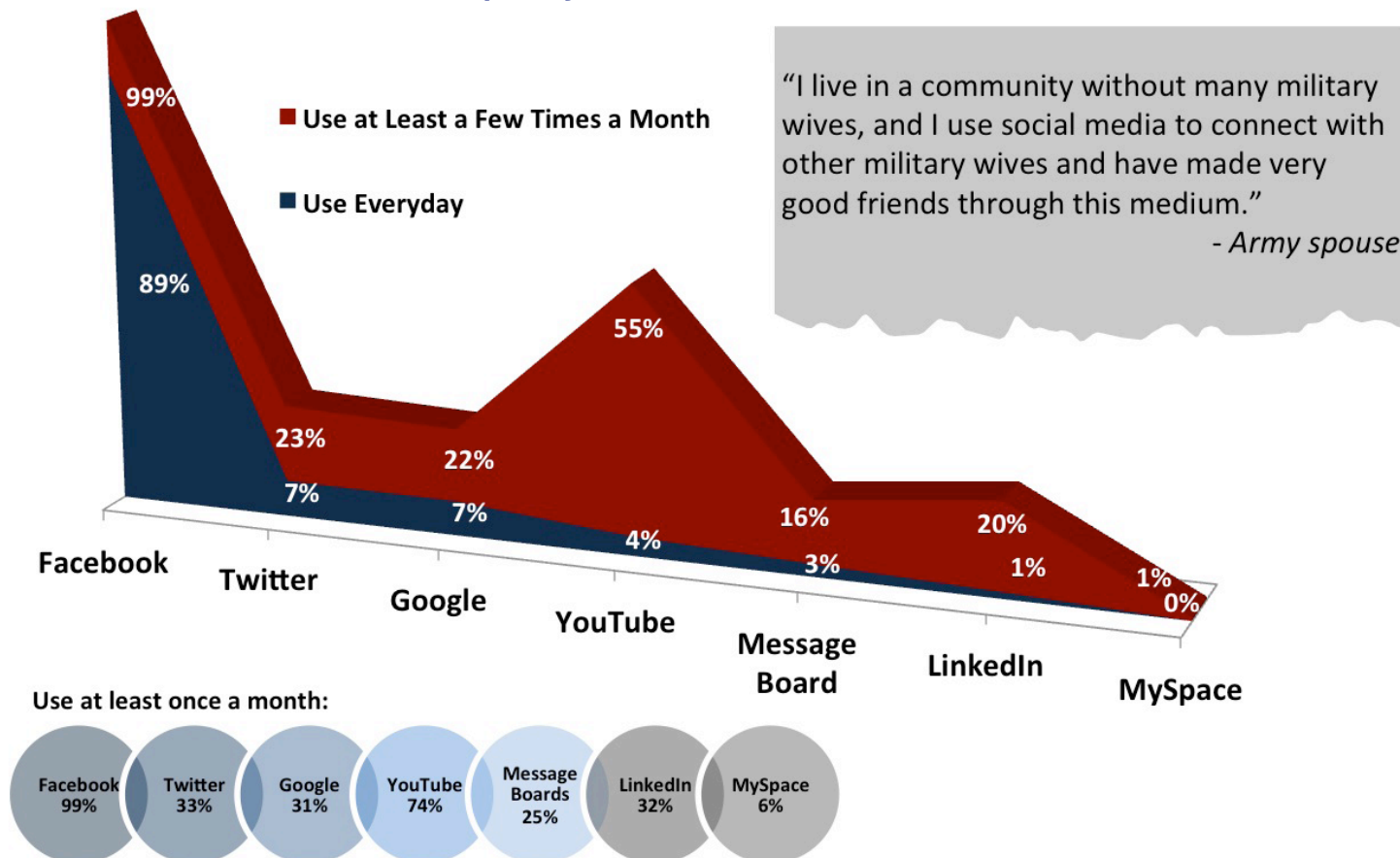
year olds, 40% of 55 to 64 year olds, and 48% of those 65 and older. In general, social media use varied based on the relationship to the service member, a trend consistent with previous Military Family Lifestyle surveys. Spouses used social media more to connect with other families and with friends who do not live near them. Other family members use social media primarily to connect with their service member.

As might be expected, the majority of respondents who said they communicated with their service members every day during their last deployment also indicated that social media was "very important" or "somewhat important." Only 16% of respondents who communicated with their service members every day during their last deployment said that social media was "not at all important," compared to 40% of those who communicated with their service members less than once a month, and 28% who communicated once a month.

Social Media Platform Use (by Branch and Age)

Seventy-two percent of respondents said that social media was "important" in keeping them connected with their service member during deployment. Among social media platforms, Facebook was reported as the most frequently used method of communication (85%) for the first time, followed by e-mail (81%). This year, video chat came in at 62%, Skype at 53%, and instant messenger was at 47%.

Popularity of Common Social Media Sites

Legend:
- Use at Least a Few Times a Month
- Use Everyday

Facebook: 99% / 89%
Twitter: 23% / 7%
Google: 22% / 7%
YouTube: 55% / 4%
Message Board: 16% / 3%
LinkedIn: 20% / 1%
MySpace: 1% / 0%

"I live in a community without many military wives, and I use social media to connect with other military wives and have made very good friends through this medium."

- Army spouse

Use at least once a month:

Facebook 99% | Twitter 33% | Google 31% | YouTube 74% | Message Boards 25% | LinkedIn 32% | MySpace 6%

Facebook usage during deployment closely followed the general social media age trends, with the highest usage among 18 to 24 year old respondents and the lowest among those 65 and older. Conversely, landline use was highest among those 65 and older, while lowest among 18 to 24 year olds, mirroring trends in the general population. Email use was consistent across age groups, and video chat was higher among 18 to 24 year olds than among those 65 and older.

> "'Yay to the green dot!!' Sometimes our soldiers do not have time to chat to us parents. But, when we see that green dot, we know they are alive." – *Army mom*

When examined by rank, Facebook usage was highest among junior enlisted service members (E1-E4), while email usage was highest among field grade officers (O4-O6), and Google Voice was highest with general grade officers. Instant messaging and video chat was highest among warrant officers, and cell phone usage was highest among company grade officers (O1-O3).

Social media use by branch varied greatly, which can perhaps be partially attributed to the unique demands of each service. The majority of respondents from all branches indicated that social media use during deployment was important, with Army National Guard the highest at 80%, followed by Army (78%), Air Force (74%), Air National Guard (72%), Marine Corps (68%), Navy (64%) and Coast Guard (58%). The Coast Guard had the highest percentage of respondents reporting social media as "not at all important" during deployment, followed by Navy and Air Force. This may be due, in part, to the number and duration of deployments for each branch/service.

Postal service use was significantly lower within the Coast Guard than any other branch, while email and cell phone use within the Coast Guard were the highest. The Coast Guard had the lowest usage of landlines and instant messaging. The higher rate of email and cell phone usage, but comparatively lower rates of postal and video chat use among the Coast Guard was most likely an indication of the type of deployments the Coast Guard experiences. The Coast Guard, Navy and Air National Guard all had the lowest use of video chat, which could be due to the quality of internet connections available during their deployments. The Air Force had the highest use of video chat and Google Voice. These usage patterns are consistent with previous Military Family Lifestyle Survey findings.

Military Family Members and Different Social Media Habits

While more than 50% of all family members labeled social media as important, the specific platforms used for communication during deployment vary by relationship to the service member, which is consistent with previous surveys. The vast majority of children and parents of service members report that social media is important, at just over 90% each. However, only 70% of spouses reported the same. The lower percentage among spouses may be a reflection of the ways service members allocate their available time to communicate with family members. With limited telephone time, spouses and service members place a higher value on speaking with each other than on using social media for communication. In fact, spouses and domestic partners had higher usage of cell phones and video chat compared to other family members. With internet access potentially more available than telephone access, deployed service members may have more time to communicate with other families members via social media. For example, siblings report had by far the highest use of Facebook when their service members are deployed. Spouses and parents used postal service more than others, while domestic partners used instant messaging the most.

In an open-ended question about social media use, family members reported using Facebook in a variety of unique ways to keep up with their service members. The platform allows families to maintain their connections during a deployment because of the ease of contact, regardless of timing, location, or having to be logged on simultaneously. Parents log on to see pictures of their service members and stay connected through "wall postings." Some parents also use it to learn more about the service to which their child has committed.

"Our family was already using it to keep in touch with friends and family across the country. Once our daughter entered military service, we used the Facebook groups AFWingMoms and Basic Military Training to keep up to date with what she was doing and to make the once-a-week call more relevant." - *Air Force spouse*

In addition to being used for maintaining relationships, many spouses said Facebook is a popular way to connect with and learn from their peers. "I live in a community without many military wives, and I use it to connect with military wives and have made very good friends through this medium," said an Army spouse. A Coast Guard spouse said, "Most of my family and friends are currently using

Facebook. I am also active with several USCG groups to learn about different PCS locations, schools, doctors, housing; just general information about the area and base assignments."

Sites Military Family Members Use to Connect With And Gather Information About the Military Community

Facebook	62%
Military OneSource	34%
Military.com	33%
Official DoD/ Govt Agency Website	19%
None of the Above	18%
Milspouse.com	17%
BlueStarFam.org	15%
Stripes.com	11%
Twitter	4%
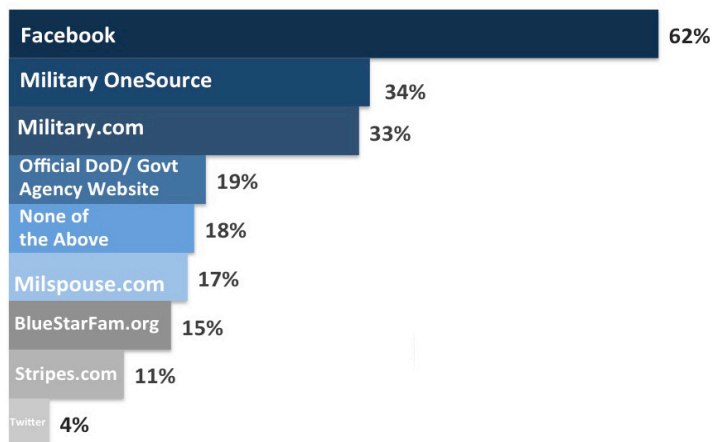
"I belong to over 20 wounded warrior wives groups on Facebook. The help I get from those groups has saved our lives, saved us from homelessness, and saved my sanity!"
- Army spouse

According to the results of the open-ended question, Twitter and LinkedIn were the distant second and third most commonly used social media. LinkedIn is primarily a medium meant for professional connections, as explained by one Army spouse who said, "It provides more professional and important updates versus updates of what your friends are doing." Interestingly, Twitter can afford an anonymity that is more difficult on Facebook, according to an Army spouse who said, "Twitter is where I feel most connected to military spouses. Twitter is a little more open. I post more there, and so do my friends. I also feel more free to express myself there. It's a bit more anonymous."

Information and Resource Seeking

Military families reported using a variety of resources to gather information about, and to feel connected to the military community. Consistent with the 2012 Survey, the top three resources were Facebook, Military OneSource, and Military.com. While military families relied more and more on social media to connect with their service members and each other, they are increasingly going offline for advice (42% in 2013 compared to 38% in 2012). Respondents reported turning to social media for advice; was up to 11% from 8% in 2012, but social media use was still outpaced by those turning to family and friends. This

year, 13% of respondents also reported turning to unit resources and 11% reported using community resources. The majority used social media to look for employment or education resources or opportunities for themselves or their service members. However, 68% said they never use LinkedIn, while just over 10% used LinkedIn once a week or more. Interestingly, 72% of spouses said they never used LinkedIn, compared with 57% of service members.

Recommendations for Social Media

- Continue to use social media to help families connect with their service members' unit, reflective of their preference in platform to encourage maximum participation

- Leverage partnerships with social media outlets to maximize each platform (e.g., using Facebook to report posts about suicide; helping military spouses and service members build networks on LinkedIn)

- Highlight best practices for unit social media (e.g., when is it helpful vs. when is it not helpful)

- Incorporate social media as an integral part of PAOs training and job functions

- Cross link important information on social media to reach the broadest possible audience

- Leverage relationships with corporate partners to provide increased access to social media for military families, increase access to resources, and develop applications that can benefit military families regardless of where they live

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Engagement and Volunteerism

In the past, researchers have defined "community" based on concepts of geographic location, political affiliation, and even psychological attachments.[130] Within the military context the concept of "community" often crosses the boundaries of geography. However, while military families use technology to feel close to each other and their service members across time zones, they also rely on geographically based connections to plug into resources, information, and support locally. In this survey, geographically and psychologically influenced engagement was expressed in a variety of pro-social behaviors:

volunteerism, relationships with neighbors, voting behavior, and charitable acts.

This year, in order to align our research on the civic health of the military community to the National Conference on Citizenship's (NCOC) Civic Health Index,[131] many questions from the 2012 survey were adapted and/or changed, which makes trending data from the 2012 survey impossible for those questions. Our intent is to develop insight into the military lifestyle as compared to the broader national population, with particular focus on assessing how the beneficial effects of service to civil society are manifesting in our military population.

This year's survey showed that 66% of respondents had volunteered through a formal organization within the last year. Twenty-four percent volunteered 6-10 hours each month, which roughly equates to one traditional full workday. Twelve percent volunteered for more than 30 hours each month, approximately the equivalent of a part-time job. Forty-four percent of military parents volunteered at their children's school or another educational group, giving further support to the role of schools as a hub of community activity for military families, much like NCOC finds in the general population.[132] The top outlets for volunteerism among military families are via military spouse organizations (44%) and other types of military-related organizations (21%). A remaining 21% were split among other volunteer outlets such as religious and faith-based groups.

Notably, respondents had strong agreement on the concepts of patriotism and citizenship. The most popular reason for joining the military was "to serve his/her country" (96%), with educational benefits coming in second at 74%. Eighty-seven percent believed in some type of national service either via the military or through other national service options. When asked about other civic responsibilities, reporting a crime (99%), paying taxes (98%), voting (97%), staying informed (95%), knowing English (91%), and volunteering (91%) were rated as important. Seventy-two percent supported the continued military service of their service members.

Even with the frequent moves associated with the military lifestyle, respondents indicated being tied into their local neighborhoods. Fifty-five percent said they trust "all" or "most of" the people in their neighborhoods, while 34% said that "some" of the people in their neighborhoods could be trusted. Ninety-two percent of respondents were registered voters, and 91% participated in the last general election. While 23% said they do not cast local ballots because of lack of community knowledge, 53% said they

stayed informed about local politics no matter where their duty stations are.

When talking about politics, few respondents actively demonstrate their positions; 88% never participate in marches, rallies, or demonstrations. However, this lack of public positioning should not be considered a general lack of engagement, as 76% do choose to express their opinions in the confines of family or friendships at least once or month or more frequently. The internet also provides an outlet for expressing options about political or community issues, and 41% of respondents participate via this platform at least once per month as well.

Net Promoter Score

For the 2013 survey, the Net Promoter Score (NPS)[133] was employed to determine respondents' tendency to recommend military service to others. While the NPS approach has been broadly applied in the private sector for over a decade, its application into the service sector is nascent. Depending on the ranking respondents give to the 11-point scale, between the spectrums of extremely unlikely to extremely likely, respondents are assigned into categories of promoters (answering 10-9), passively satisfied (answering 8-7), or detractors (answering 6-0).

How likely would it be that you would advise your child or another young person close to you to join the military?

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Not At All Likely   Very Likely

23.3% are 'Promoters' (score 9–10) Want to have others benefit from the experience.
25.3% are 'Passives' (score 7–8) Satisfied yet unenthusiastic with the experience.
51.3% are 'Detractors' (score 0–6) Unhappy enough to not advise the experience to others.

NPS Score = (% of Promoters) – (% of Detractors)

-28% = 23.3% – 51.3%

MILITARY LIFE EARNS AN NPS OF -28% FROM RESPONDENTS

® Net Promoter Score is registered by Satmetrix, Bain & Company and Fred Reichheld.

The range of the NPS metric can be anywhere between -100% to 100%, and some benchmarks in NPS do exist in the customer engagement realm. For example, military insurance and banking company USAA has a NPS of 83%. The telecommunications company Mediacom has a -21% score. Overall, our respondents' tendency to recommend military service to their children or another young person ranked at -28%. Active duty service members had a NPS score of -17.6%, while spouses of service members had a NPS score of -38.8%. The purpose in shifting this question to the Net Promoter Score is to establish a way of

segmenting the experience "promoters" are having with the military versus the experience "detractors" are having with the military.

By understanding the difference between these NPS groups, the value of the feedback may potentially become more actionable. That stated, continued research to establish driving factors and trending experiences for "promoters," "passively satisfieds," and "detractors" is largely absent from the literature as it pertains to non-profit or service-based organizations. Many factors could influence the NPS for the military: stress, financial stability, civilian support, public policy, services, etc. Until more research is conducted among non-profit and service organizations, we can only state that, in the private sector, understanding what drives NPS and acting upon increasing promoters has been directly correlated to sustainable, long-term relationships and growth.[134] A comparable indicator within the non-profit and government sectors - and within the DoD in particular - could be extremely useful in gauging whether the tendency to recommend service to a close family member or young person has implications for the sustainability of an all-volunteer force.

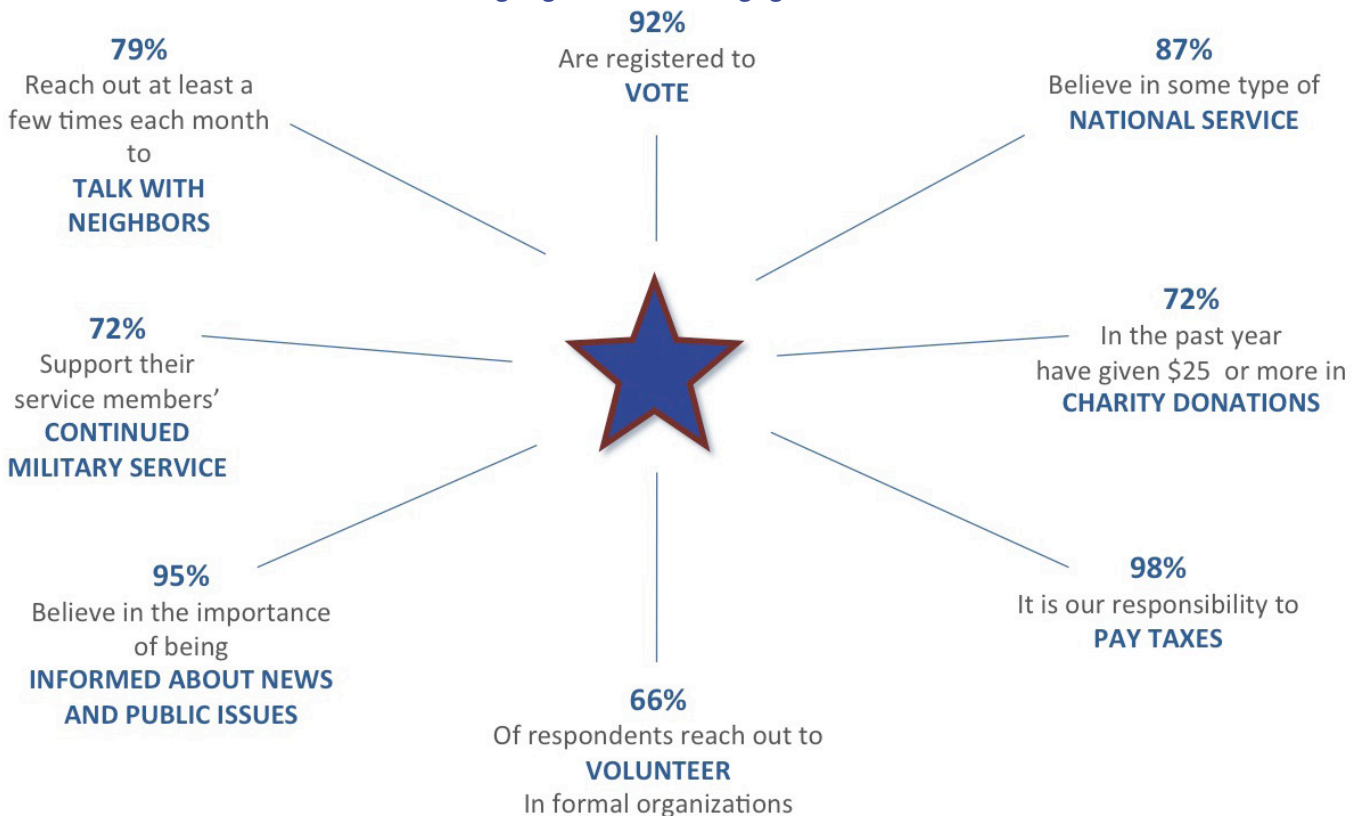## Joining Forces to Bridge the Civilian-Military Divide

This year's findings continue to indicate a distinctive civilian-military cultural divide.[135] Eighty-eight percent of respondents disagreed with the statement, "The general

public is aware of the impacts of military service on military families." And, 92% disagreed with the statement, "The general public truly understands the sacrifices made by service members and their families." Pew Research Center's 2011 survey results were comparable and showed 84% of modern-era veterans felt that the general public does not have an understanding of the problems that those in the military face.[136]
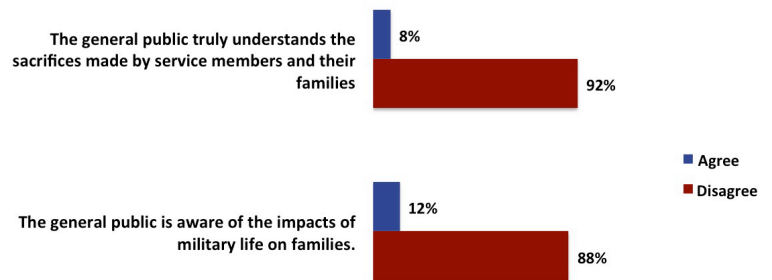
Previous research has sought to identify specific mediating approaches for linking and interfacing informal networks with local communities in order to bridge this unfortunate and unproductive gap. Additionally, much recent programming has been developed with the specific aim of decreasing it. The White House's Joining Forces initiative has been focused on building bridges between the civilian community and military members and their families while

Highlights of Civic Engagement

92% Are registered to **VOTE**

79% Reach out at least a few times each month to **TALK WITH NEIGHBORS**

87% Believe in some type of **NATIONAL SERVICE**

72% Support their service members' **CONTINUED MILITARY SERVICE**

72% In the past year have given $25 or more in **CHARITY DONATIONS**

95% Believe in the importance of being **INFORMED ABOUT NEWS AND PUBLIC ISSUES**

98% It is our responsibility to **PAY TAXES**

66% Of respondents reach out to **VOLUNTEER** In formal organizations

leveraging the best of the public, private, and non-profit sectors have to offer. Having just celebrated its second anniversary, *Joining Forces* has demonstrated the value of collaboration with successes surrounding military spouse and veteran employment and military child education. However, there is still a long way to go. While traction is being made with regard to awareness of the sacrifices made by service members and their families, seven in 10 Americans say that it is "just part of being in the military."[137]

PUBLIC POLICY

Confidence in Institutions and Foreign Policy

With regard to confidence levels in institutions, general confidence is defined as the conviction that everything is under control and uncertainty is low.[138] Respondents in this survey had the greatest level of institutional confidence in the military (85%), followed by public schools (75%), non-elected public servants (62%), and government and state agencies (58%).

And, while elected officials and the media have, perhaps, the greatest opportunities to contribute to the national dialogue on decreasing the civilian-military divide while increasing trust in institutions, they also have the lowest vote of confidence by respondents. A majority of respondents reported "no confidence" or "hardly any confidence" for the media (70%), corporations (56%), and elected officials (56%). This lack of confidence in elected officials mirrors that of the general U.S. population.[139]

The low level of confidence in elected officials expressed by respondents is especially worrisome given the unique influence their decisions have on the lives of service members and their families. For example, elected officials have a direct impact upon the lives of military families based on their votes on budgetary and national security issues; most recently, this is being experienced as a result of sequestration.

Respondents were also asked about their views on several other political issues. When asked about priorities within the global environment, 31% of respondents took an isolationist stance on U.S. foreign policy, agreeing that the United States should pay less attention to problems overseas and focus more on our problems at home.

Additionally, respondents were almost evenly split (at 16% and 17% respectively) between military strength and good diplomacy as the best way to ensure peace; this emulates the Pew Research Center's 2012 survey findings, in which

2013 METER OF INSTITUTIONAL CONFIDENCE

Elected Officials **44%**

Corporations **44%**

Media **29%**

58% Government/State Agencies

62% Non-Elected Officials

75% Public Schools

85% Military

confidence

Percentages Combine Reports of "Some Confidence" and "a Great Deal of Confidence"

Americans were also divided on this view (53% vs. 43%). Sixty-eight percent of respondents to this survey felt that an equal measure of military strength and good diplomacy is the best way to ensure peace.

Future consideration in how corporations, politicians and, media outlets can regain healthy levels of trust and confidence is a direction for continued research that could also serve to reduce the civilian-military divide. Particular focus should be placed on the impact of elected officials and the media to create disproportionate levels of uncertainty for military families.

Impact of the Repeal of DADT

The repeal of the DoD's "Don't Ask Don't Tell" (DADT) policy, which mandated the discharge of openly gay, lesbian, or bisexual service members, occurred in September of 2011. An overwhelming majority of respondents reported that the repeal has had no impact across a host of issues: 55% reported no impact on service member unit cohesion; 72% percent reported no impact on service member desire to re-enlist or stay in the military; 65% reported no impact on service member morale; 75% reported no impact on service member ability to perform his/her job; 62% reported no impact on mission readiness or national security; 64% reported no impact on military support group morale; and 71% reported no impact on their desire to attend military functions. These findings are consistent with last year's survey (fielded three months after the repeal) as well as a more recent study published by the Palm Center one year after the repeal of DADT. The Palm Center's study reported that, "the repeal of DADT has had no overall negative impact on military readiness or its component dimensions, including cohesion, recruitment, retention, assaults, harassment or morale".[140]

Additionally, the finding that DADT's repeal has not had a discernable impact on military families is supported by previous research on other NATO countries' integration of

LGBT individuals into the armed services. "Officials, military scholars, non-governmental and political leaders, and gay and lesbian soldiers all concur that the removal of the ban has had, to their knowledge, no perceptible negative effect on the military."[141] In Israel, lifting the ban had no negative effects on military effectiveness, performance, and unit cohesion; and in Canada, LGBT integration did not cause any decrease in military performance, effectiveness, or unit cohesion.[142,143]

In February of 2013, Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta announced that, under new policy changes that will complete the DoD's repeal of DADT, service members and retirees with same-sex partners will qualify for up to twenty-four new benefits beginning October 1, 2013.[144] Still unaddressed DoD benefits include housing, medical and dental care, and overseas command sponsorship for same-sex partners,[145] which are all restricted under the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) that defines marriage as the legal union of one man and one woman for federal and inter-state recognition purposes in the United States. The U.S. Supreme Court is currently in the process of hearing an appeal to DOMA, United States v. Windsor, with a ruling expected in May of 2013. While there remain some unresolved areas with regard to this policy change, these survey results confirm current and previous research that indicates that there has been minimal impact on perceptions of military readiness, recruitment, retention, or morale due to the policy repeal.

Percentage of Respondents Saying The Reversal of DADT Had "No Impact"

	2013	2012
Your Service Member's Unit Cohesion	55%	X
Your Service Member's Desire to Re-enlist/Stay in the Military	72%	65%
Your Service Member's Morale	65%	60%
Your Service Member's Ability to Perform Their Job	75%	72%
Mission Readiness or National Security in General	62%	56%
Your Military Support Group's Morale	64%	55%
Your Desire to Attend Military Functions	71%	68%

"Because of DOMA, my wife and I are unable to receive the same benefits and services that other married couples get. This has made our lives much more difficult. For instance, since we PCSed last year, I have not been able to find work. This leaves me without insurance and, because we do not get the dependant BAH and BAS, puts an immense strain on our finances. We do not qualify for base housing and many other programs which could benefit our family. This environment creates a sense of isolation in gay and lesbian troops. The separate treatment is a morale killer. All married service members should receive the same treatment."
- Air Force domestic partner

Recommendations for Decreasing the Civilian-Military Divide

■ Encourage veterans and spouses to continue their leadership in public service, especially public sector careers. Build targeted and coordinated efforts at the federal and state levels to recruit them through systematic and proactive partnerships across the public, private, and non-profit sectors

■ Identify qualified veterans and spouses for appointments and task forces at all levels of government

■ Utilize resources like the House and Senate Military Family Caucuses and the Joining Forces initiative to host symposiums, forums, and meetings where military families can provide feedback and input to national leadership, leveraging partnerships across public, private, and non-profit sectors

■ Use volunteerism as a strong value through which to build bridges with the civilian community. Serving side by side, through a variety of activities and in pursuit of a collective goal, facilitates understanding and connection

■ Encourage involvement, examination, and partnership with universities to pursue academic research in the area of national service and military family policy

CONCLUSION

The end of the era of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars is very welcome by military families, but it is not an end to the challenges of the military lifestyle. Service members and their loved ones know that we live in a dynamic and unpredictable world. Nearly 70,000 remain deployed in Afghanistan, tens of thousands of others continue to deploy in every time zone; the future is unknown but almost certain to be challenging. The nation will continue to move and use its military; while at the same time, because of budget constraints and shifting missions, funding for many aspects of military work and life will be cut, and many who wish to continue to serve in military will instead be part of the drawdown.

Since this survey was administered, the impact of sequestration has been notable in the form of deployment cancellations and delays; but there have also been increased uncertainties with scheduled PCS moves, and DoD schools are enduring budget cuts and furloughs that are impacting the education of our children. As readers review this report, survey responses and interpretations should be made with today's current events in mind.

A positive by-product of these past years is that policy-makers have come to understand military families' needs and concerns much better. The military services initiated many good programs for families. Yet many of these programs now face cuts. Particularly in the face of sequestration, military families and service members anxiously wait to see how they will be personally affected by the changes. We are experiencing a confluence of factors: shifting missions, budget cuts, and a military community still processing the effects of a decade of war.

Thoughtful action now requires careful, data-driven allocation of resources, creative collaboration across the public and private spheres (such as those initiated by the *Joining Forces*) and including the military family as a partner in identifying their keenest challenges, their strengths, and the best programs for helping strengthen this community for the future.

Because the military services will be unable to fund all the support that military families need, and because in many cases military families do not prefer to seek support services from within Department of Defense resources, the connection between military families and their local communities is of increasing importance. So it continues to be a concern that military families consistently express a sense of alienation from the larger community.

The results of this survey are intended, in part, to bridge that gap, by providing concrete information about the unique aspects of military life and to bring awareness to the strengths and contributions of the military service culture to American life. After all, it has been shown that a strong sense of community can directly contribute to positive family adaptation as it "reflects the meaning that people attach to their interactions with others, whether these others are part of formal support (the unit) or part of informal support (friends, etc.)."[146]

With the wheels of transition in motion, **Blue Star Families** challenges the readers of this report to take these results using them to align their resources by "doing more with less," just as military service members and their families always have done both in operations and on the homefront. Perhaps the biggest challenge, to not only the military, but also to our country, is to create, adapt, and improve our support structures and develop community capacity to effectively serve our active duty forces and their families, enabling them to apply their strong sense of duty and service towards the benefit and future of our nation.

About the Authors

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