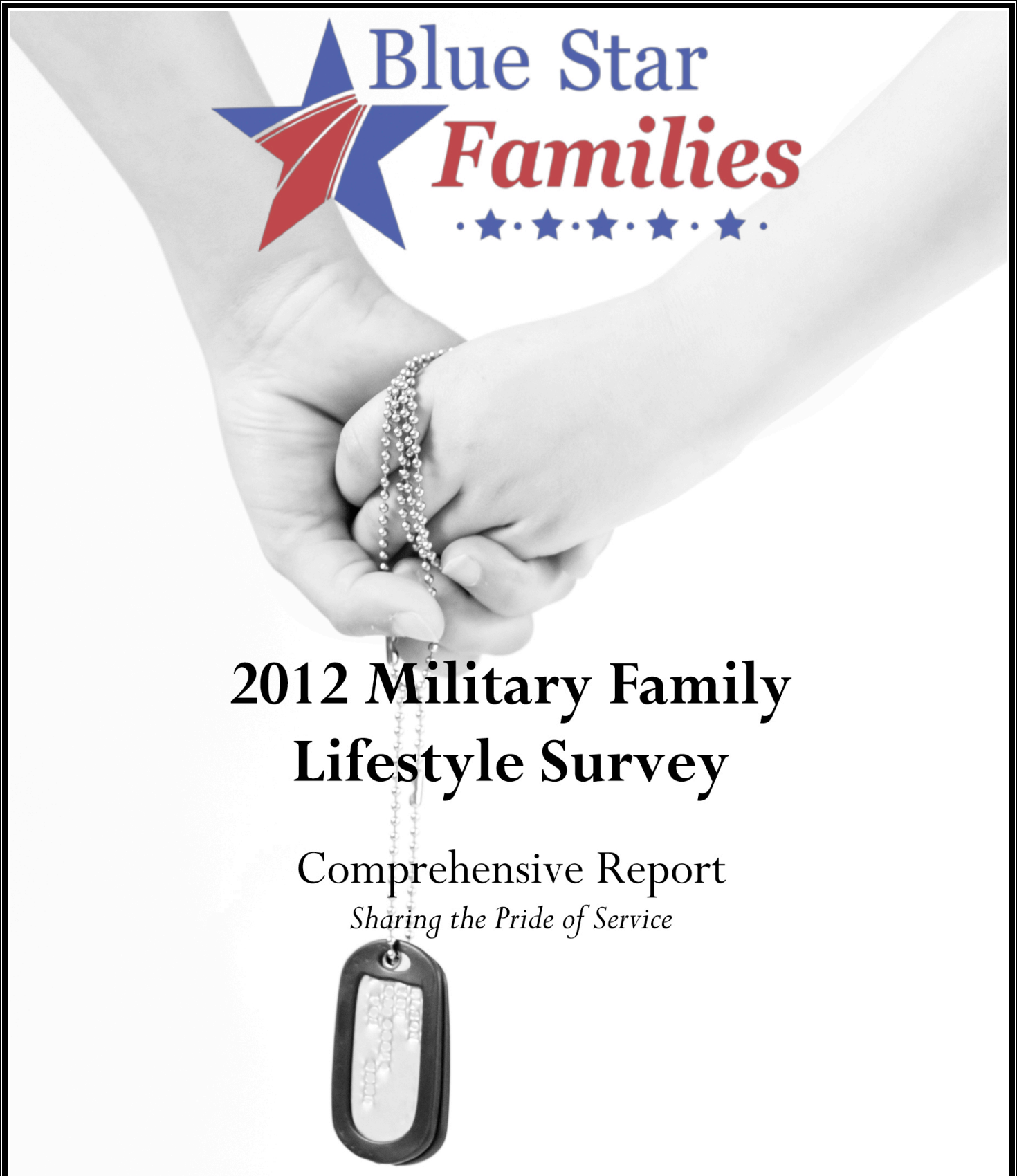
Blue Star Families



2012 Military Family Lifestyle Survey

Comprehensive Report

Sharing the Pride of Service

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Foreword

April 27, 2012

One year ago, First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden launched Joining Forces, a ground-breaking initiative to raise awareness among Americans regarding the service, sacrifice, and needs of our nation's service members, veterans, and military families. Joining Forces focuses on employment, education, and wellness, issues that touch all of us who are members of the broader Military Family.

The results of the 2012 Blue Star Families' Military Family Lifestyle Survey reinforce that Joining Forces indeed has the right focus. Over the last year, this new initiative has inspired companies across the nation to hire more than 50,000 veterans and military spouses. Fourteen states have passed license portability laws that support military spouses who move across the country with their service member. More than six hundred medical and nursing schools are developing curriculum to train the next generation of doctors and nurses on the healthcare needs of military families, including the conditions of war's invisible wounds: post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injuries. All told, Joining Forces has inspired more than thirteen million hours of volunteer service in communities across America through the Blue Star Families' honor card program.

These actions demonstrate the importance of partnerships: from public-private sector collaboration to community led partnerships, all striving to help our military families. Marty and I believe that private sector organizations, often blessed with ample resources and expertise, will play an essential role in our nation's collective efforts to care for our military families who have endured so much over the last ten years.

I encourage you to read this report and to use the data to find ways to reach and help those military families in your community. Thank you to Blue Star Families and your partnering organizations for conducting this survey. Our service members and veterans have done so much for us, and now it is our turn to help them. Organizations such as Blue Star Families ask us, as a nation, to answer that call to serve our military families and to build upon the sacred bond of trust between the military and our nation.

Deanie Dempsey
Blue Star Spouse and Mom

Authors
From the Office of Research and Policy
Blue Star Families

Vivian Greentree, Ph.D., Director
Shana Johnson, Research Analyst
Cammy Elquist Lore, Research Analyst
Leah Dagher, Research Analyst
Jennifer A. Taylor, Research Analyst

With help from:
Kathleen Levingston, Ph.D., Assistant Analyst
Kitsa Lee, Assistant Analyst
AnnaMaria Mannino White, Assistant Analyst

Special thanks to:
Lauren Enderlin
Lea Xenakis

Blue Star Families, Department of Research and Policy.
2012 Military Family Lifestyle Survey: Findings and Analysis. Washington, D.C. 2012 May.

Blue Star Families is a non-profit organization, founded and run by actual military families. We are committed to *supporting* one another through the unique challenges of military service and asking the larger civilian population to help; *connecting* military families regardless of rank, branch of service or physical location; and *empowering* military family members to create the best possible personal and family lives for themselves.

Blue Star Families gives military families a voice. Through online and physical chapter-based communities, **Blue Star Families** serves as a bridge between families and the various support and service organizations that are striving to help make military life more sustainable. Through outreach and involvement with national and local organizations, civilian communities and government entities, **Blue Star Families** works hand in hand to share the pride of service, promote healthier families, aid military readiness and contribute to our country's strength.

Blue Star Families, Inc.
P.O. Box 322
Falls Church, Virginia 22040

Blue Star Families
www.BlueStarFam.org

INTRODUCTION

The men and women serving in the military and the families supporting them are an integral part of America's national security. Every day military families are serving on their own front lines at home. They are sustaining themselves and supporting service members who are preparing, deploying, returning or reintegrating after combat. These families are the backbone of a strong and able United States military. Therefore, we must listen carefully and address the concerns of the military families who play a central and critical role in supporting United States forces while ensuring readiness for current and future national security needs.

BACKGROUND AND INTENT

This report details the results of the third **Blue Star Families'** Military Family Lifestyle Survey. Previous findings have helped identify and explore the issues that face those who serve in the military and their families, and have provided valuable insight, impacted policy development, and educated military leadership, government decision-makers and the general public on the challenges and stressors impacting today's military families.

Conducted online in November 2011 with over four-thousand military family respondents, the 2012 Military Family Lifestyle Survey was designed to reveal key trends in military family relationships and careers by examining, among other things, feelings of stress, financial literacy, spouse employment, effects of deployment, levels of communication and civic engagement. The following results will help educate a variety of stakeholders about the unique lifestyles of modern day military families after they have experienced a decade of continuous war.

Through an extensive series of questions that examined many different aspects of military family life, the 2012 Military Family Lifestyle Survey demonstrates that military families are experiencing the effects of ten years of high operational tempo (OPTEMPO) and are actively seeking ways in which to mitigate the negative impacts on their relationships, their mental health and their children. Additionally, many military families continue to feel disconnected from the communities where they live, so more work remains to be done to obtain a realistic representation of military family experiences and to bridge the gap of understanding between the military and civilian communities. There were also positive trends found in this study. While they acknowledged challenges associated with military service, a majority of respondents reported that the all-volunteer force has worked well, that they support the continued service of their own service member, and that they would recommend military service to their children. These results also point to the strong pro-social tendencies and civic assets that reside within the military community. Respondents' participation in community-oriented behavior like volunteering, voting, and helping their neighbors informally was very high.

Of note, military families identified several key areas of concern, including pay and benefits, with specific emphasis on retirement benefit changes, the effects of deployment on children, general OPTEMPO, military spouse employment, and issues surrounding Post Traumatic Stress (PTS), combat stress and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). Additionally, **Blue Star Families**' 2012 Military Lifestyle Survey for the first time included sections on the topical areas of suicide prevention, financial literacy, Exceptional Family Member Programming (EFMP), care-giving and public policy. This year's survey also discussed how

military families support each other and stay connected to the military community and to their service members.

For this survey, **Blue Star Families** was honored to have the assistance of the following partner organizations: the American Red Cross, the United Service Organizations (USO), the Armed Forces YMCA, Military.com, Military Spouse Magazine, Association of the United States Army (AUSA),Service Nation, the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC), the Military Spouse Corporate Career Network (MSCCN), Military Officer's Association of America (MOAA), National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS), Operation Homefront, the Reserve Officers Association (ROA), Student Veterans of America (SVA), National Military Family Association (NMFA), the Veterans Innovation Center and Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW). Additionally, dozens of websites, blogs, military family advocates and organizations promoted the survey through their memberships and networks. The wide distribution of this survey through our partners and others in the military community greatly contributed to the high level of response and helped this survey reach a comprehensive sample of military personnel and their families.

METHODOLOGY

The 2012 Military Family Lifestyle Survey was designed by **Blue Star Families**, with extensive input from military family members, practitioners, advocates and policymakers who work with military families. This survey is intended to facilitate a more complete understanding of military families' experiences so that communities and policymakers can better serve their unique needs, thereby making military service more sustainable.

Blue Star Families worked with other national military community organizations that helped to distribute the survey to their own readership and membership. 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 Department of Defense (DoD) 2010 Demographic Report.

The survey was administered online using a self-selected, convenience sample. Of the 4,234 military family members that started the survey, seventy-nine percent (2,891) completed the entire questionnaire. The number of respondents varies per question per applicability to the respondent. The survey was available from November 4th to December 2nd, 2011.

Many sections of this survey, specifically the sections on children's deployment experiences, military child education, the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) schools, EFMP, childcare, spousal relationship and deployment stress, mental health issues, suicide prevention, spouse employment, and financial literacy were only available to spouse and self (service member) respondents. Questions about the top 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.

It should be noted that the majority of questions on the survey were optional, allowing respondents the choice to skip any question with which they were uncomfortable or did not apply to them. Therefore, as mentioned above, the actual number of responses per question varies throughout the survey.

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 overseas military installations.

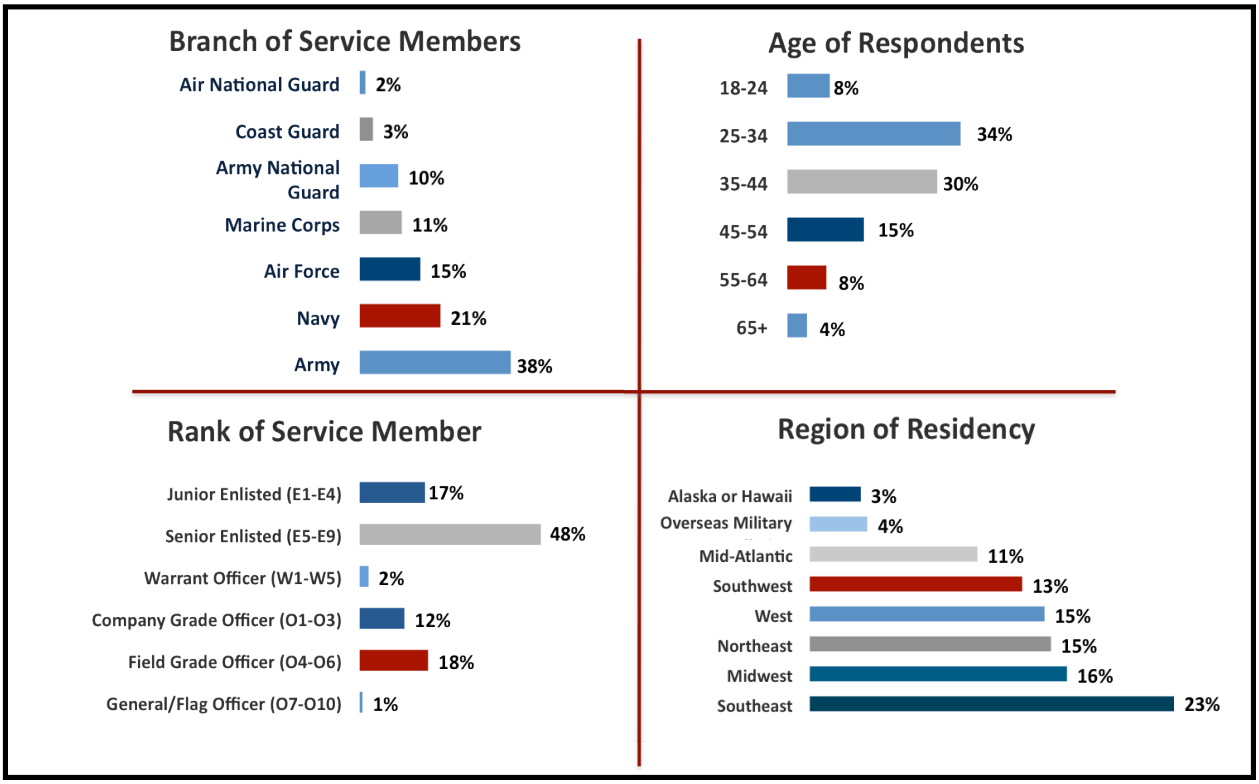
Survey respondents were asked to identify their primary relationship with the military based on the service member through whom they receive Department of Defense benefits, if applicable. Nearly sixty percent of the survey's respondents had more than one immediate family member affiliated with the military, and sixty-eight percent were spouses. Seventeen percent of the respondents were service members, six percent were parents and five percent were children of service members.

More than seventy-five percent of the survey respondents were affiliated with active-duty military personnel, four percent were affiliated with the Reserve, another five percent with the Drilling Guard, Drilling Reserve or the Inactive Drilling Guard. Twelve percent were affiliated with retired veterans and three percent with non-retired veterans. Sixty-five percent of respondents were affiliated with enlisted service personnel, and four percent of survey respondents resided in overseas military installations. Survey respondents residing in the United States were fairly evenly distributed across the country.

Eighty-five percent of respondents were female, and sixty-four percent of respondents had minor children living at home. Twenty-three percent of respondents identified themselves as a minority race or ethnic group, and eighty-seven percent of respondents have completed some college or achieved an associates,

bachelors or graduate degree. Sixty-four percent of survey respondents were between the ages of twenty-five and forty-four.

This demographic background sets the foundation for the story of military families, a diverse group of individuals from all walks of life. Military families are drawn together by their commitment to service and the experiences they share of loving someone in the military.



SURVEY OVERVIEW

Today's military families have experienced a decade of war. There is a new generation of military children who have grown up in this "new normal," while service members and their families have adapted new communication technologies like Skype and Facebook to adjust to the increased time spent apart. At their core, these same military families are central to mission readiness and for the first time ever have even been referred to in relation to national security, a reflection of their key role in sustaining a functioning military. Perhaps this is because there is a growing awareness that military families are directly affected by national security and defense polices to an extent much greater than non-military families.

The high OPTEMPO of the past decade has placed enormous stress on the military and their families, who shoulder the burdens of war and strain on the country's military forces in a very personal way. The multiple and sustained deployments over the last ten years have impacted mental health and wellness as well as relationship development. For every period of time that family members are separated by deployment,

there is a related block of time the service member will be on temporary duty (TDY) or trainings that will also keep them away from family. While deployments are stressful due to the combat factor, the impact of pre-deployment activity also takes its toll on the ability of families to be together. When military families encounter additional challenges like impediments to resources and support when seeking childcare, adequate health care, and spouse employment, enduring financial difficulties or feeling isolated from their communities, the strain can become overwhelming and the family suffers. And, as military leadership has known for decades (as evidenced by ever expanding and evolving programs to support military families), when the military family unit is in distress, service members cannot focus on their mission.

The crucial role that military families play in national security makes providing empirical data on them vitally important, especially now. **Blue Star Families**' survey findings and other research targeting the military family experience provide valuable and needed insight for policymakers, government and military leadership, and the larger civilian community on the topical issues that military families feel are important. With a clearer understanding of where military families are, regarding a host of life cycle issues, everyone can do their part to help promote healthier families, aid military readiness, and contribute to a strong national defense.

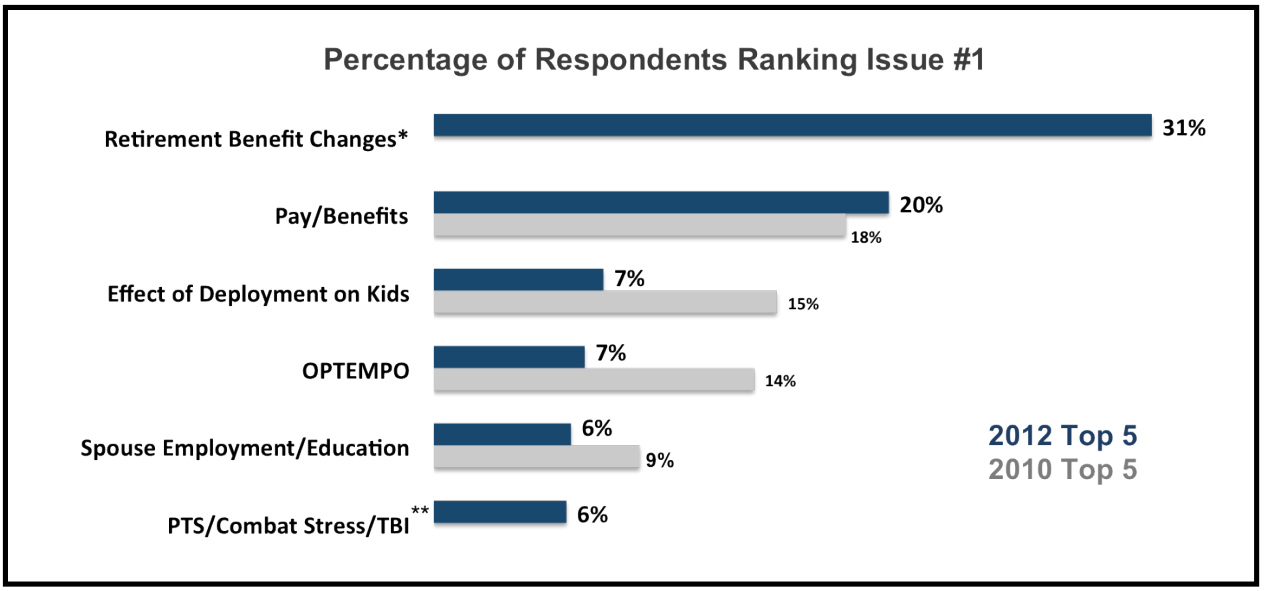
The five issues identified by respondents as top concerns for military families are pay/benefits, with emphasis on the changes to retirement benefits, the effects of deployment on children, general OPTEMPO, military spouse employment, and issues surrounding Post Traumatic Stress (PTS), combat stress, and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). Additional areas, which warrant more examination and action given the feedback from respondents in this survey, include financial literacy, suicide prevention, exceptional family member programming, care-giving and community engagement. 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. These are all issues that play a part in retention and readiness, and in the overall health and wellness of our military community.

Unfortunately, the gap between our military and civilian communities continues to persist, with ninety-five percent of respondents agreeing with the statement, "The general public does not truly understand or appreciate the sacrifices made by service members and their families." It is **Blue Star Families**' goal that the following findings will help bridge this gap in understanding and provide a foundation for renewed engagement between our service members, their families, and the communities in which they live.

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

As mentioned above, the issues identified by respondents as top concerns for military families were changes to retirement benefits, pay/benefits, the effects of deployment on children, OPTEMPO, military spouse education and employment, and issues surrounding Post Traumatic Stress (PTS), combat stress, and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

What are the top military issues that most concern you?



* Option not included in 2010 survey. **Option not ranked as top issue in 2010. Slight percentage differences occur among the bottom four issues when percentages are shown to the tenths: Effect of Deployment on Kids= 7.4% OPTEMPO= 6.5%; Spouse Employment/Education= 6.0%; PTSD/Combat Stress/TBI= 5.8%.

Top Issues:

Changes to Retirement Benefits and Pay/Benefits: Thirty-one percent of respondents listed changes to retirement benefits as their top military family life issue while twenty percent of respondents cited pay/benefits as their top concern. When veterans were asked about concerns related to separating from the military, twenty-five percent cited employment opportunities as their top concern, nineteen percent cited changes to health care access, and six percent cited issues with civilian licensing or certification.

Effects of Deployments on Children: Seven percent of respondents listed effects of deployment on their children as their top concern. When asked a separate question about overall concerns for their military children, twenty-three percent of parents mentioned "deployment" in their responses. Fifty-two percent said there were some negative effects to deployment, but some positive effects too. Forty-one percent felt like their community did not embrace opportunities to help their military children.

OPTEMPO: Seven percent of respondents listed the operational tempo of the military as their top concern. Deployments account for half the total time service members have spent away from their families since September 11, 2001 while trainings and TDY's are also significant contributors to family separations. And, the length of time spent apart was found to impact a respondent's support of continued military service for their service member. Fifty-two percent of respondents who had experienced thirteen to twenty-four months of deployment separation supported continued military service whereas support dropped to fifteen percent for those who had experienced thirty-seven months or more of separation.

Military Spouse Employment: Fifty-seven percent of spouses felt that being a military spouse had a negative impact on their ability to pursue a career. Of the sixty percent who were not currently employed, fifty-three percent wanted to be. When asked their reasons for not working, ninety-two percent mentioned job market alignment and sixty-seven percent cited childcare issues. Twenty-seven percent of spouses had faced challenges with their state licenses, certifications or other professional qualifications due to military-oriented moves across state lines, and twenty-six percent currently are or have operated their own business as a military spouse.

PTS/TBI/Combat Stress: Six percent of respondents listed PTS/TBI/Combat Stress as their top military family life issue. Three percent of respondents reported that their service member had been diagnosed with TBI while eleven percent reported that their service member was diagnosed with PTS. However, twenty-six percent reported that, *regardless of diagnosis,* their service member had exhibited symptoms of PTS. Of those who reported that their service member had exhibited symptoms of PTS, sixty-two percent had not sought treatment.

Additional Findings Of Note:

Children's Education: Nintety-two percent of respodents were confident they could help their children make positive in-school decisions regarding their child's future during a spouse's deployment. However, sixty-four percent said their child's participation in extracurricular activies was negatively impacted by deployment. Sixty-three percent of respondents reported that their children's school did not utilize a Military School Liaison, forty-seven percent of respondents reported that their children's school does not find opportunities to celebrate and include the service member in the the classroom, and forty-one percent said their child's school was not responsive to unique military situations, all indicators that more needs to be done in the area of military child education.

EFMP: Seventeen percent of respondents said their family was currently enrolled in the EFMP, while thirteen percent said they were not currently enrolled but thought their family would qualify. Twenty percent of EFMP family respondents reported that EFMP enrollment has had a negative impact on their service member's career. The top three challenges associated with moving for families with exceptional family members were finding new doctors and therapists (forty-three percent), TRICARE (referrals and prescriptions) (thirty-seven percent), and educational accomodations (thirty-four percent).

Suicide Prevention: The percentage of family members who have considered suicide (ten percent) is almost equal to the percentage of service members who have considered suicide (nine percent). Forty-two percent of respondents felt that the Department of Defense was handling the issue of suicide poorly. Fifty-seven percent thought the top priority in prevention efforts should be aimed at preventative training for frontline supervisors and commanders.

Financial Literacy: When asked about financial education within the military community, fifty-three percent of respondents said their unit provided financial education information and they knew where to go with questions. Sixty-two percent said they wanted greater emphasis on preventative financial education and sixty-eight percent felt stress about debt, savings or their overall financial condition. Sixty-four percent owed less than $5,000 on their credit cards.

Volunteerism and Civic Engagement: Eighty-one percent of respondents had volunteered in the last year, with the largest percentage of outlets being informal in nature. Impresively, ten percent of respondents volunteered over thirty hours a month. Eighty-nine percent of respondents are currently registered to vote, and eighty-two percent had voted in the last presidential election. Other exciting findings were that eighty-two percent of repondents believe that the all-volunteer force has worked well and seventy-three percent support their service member's continued military service. Sixty percent would advise a young person to join the military and seventy percent expressed satisfaction with the military lifestyle.

Public Policy – Don't Ask Don't Tell: When asked about the effects, if any, of the reversal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT), a majority of respondents felt the repeal had no impact. In fact, seventy-two percent of respondents said it had no impact on their service member's ability to do his/her job, sixty-five percent said it had no impact on their service member's desire to re-enlist or stay in the military, and sixty percent said it had no impact on their service member's morale. Fifty-six percent said the repeal had no impact on mission readiness or national security, and fifty-five percent of spouses said it had no impact on their military support group's morale.

Social Media: Seventy-seven precent of respondents indicated that social media is important or very important for communicating with their service member during deployment, while seventy-one percent reported using social media to connect with other military families. Additionally, while forty-five percent of overall respondents said their service members' unit uses Facebook to disseminate information, only sixteen percent said they use social media to stay connected with the unit. The top three resources for online information-gathering were split between official and non-official sources - Facebook, Military OneSource, and Military.com.

PAY, BENEFITS, & CHANGES TO RETIREMENT

Top military and national concerns for families are driven by economic security

Respondents cited issues of pay and benefits, specifically emphasizing proposed changes to retirement benefits as their top military community-related concerns. It should be noted that the survey was fielded during heightened media coverage about Defense Business Board recommendations to radically change retirement benefits.[1] To reflect concerns surrounding this issue, the 2012 survey included "Change in Benefits" as a selection option in the Top Military Issues question, while the 2010 survey did not include this option. It was the number one military issue, with thirty-one percent of respondents ranking it as the top issue and fifty-two percent of all respondents ranking it within one of the top three issues that concerned them. Twenty percent of respondents listed pay and benefits in general as their top concern, and it was the second highest concern overall, solidifying the identification of economic security concerns within the military community. These findings correspond with the 2010 Military Family Lifestyle Survey's findings in which pay and benefits were found to be the number one military concern of respondents. This lack of confidence in the financial realm could be heightened by several other convergent trends. According to recent figures by the Defense Commissary Agency, the number of food stamp purchases at military commissaries have nearly tripled in the last four years.[2] Additionally, general nervousness about potential changes to military retirement benefits, specifically the proposed phase-out of the traditional twenty-year retirement, in combination with concerns about the current climate of economic uncertainty, proposed force draw downs, and high levels of military spouse and veteran unemployment all impact military families' feelings of economic security.

When asked about top national issues of concern, forty percent of respondents chose the economy as the number one national issue, with employment/job creation ranked second. The third national issue of most concern was the withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan. Other questions, designed to capture concerns of those transitioning out of active duty, revealed that the top concern was post-service employment opportunities, for those with less than twenty years of service as well as those with twenty years or more. Other transition concerns of note were "Loss of Income" and "Changes in Health Care Access," which provide additional validity to the importance of "Change in Benefits" as the top military issue in the context of several contributing national economic trends, shifting DoD/VA agendas and policies, and service member transitions into civilian employment.

FAMILY WELLBEING

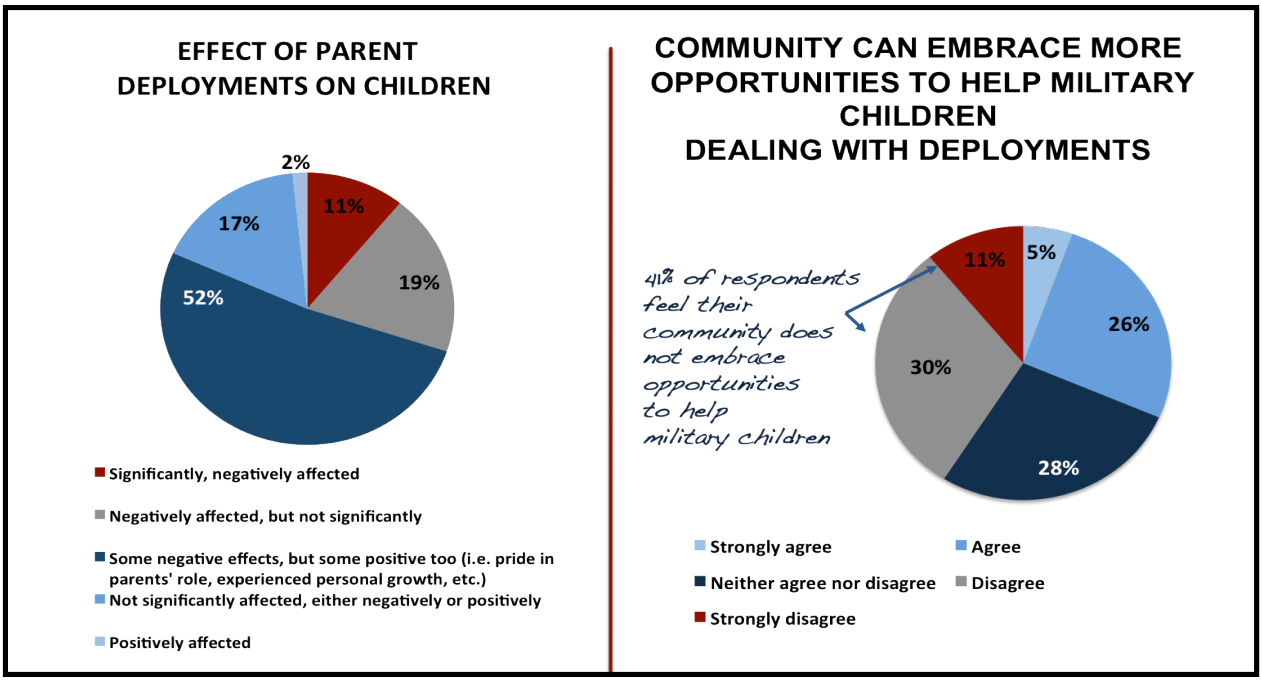
THE MILITARY CHILD

Effects of Deployments on Children

Multiple deployments, longer separations and the sustained level of OPTEMPO are taking their toll on military children. The concerns of parents are valid; military children experience significant emotional and behavioral problems associated with the military family lifestyle and the current OPTEMPO. A recent study found that school aged children who have undergone parental deployments have a high likelihood of developing social and psychological problems.[3] And, in a recent RAND study of military children with a deployed parent, there was a nineteen percent increase in behavioral disorders.[4] The study also found that both adolescents and young children enduring the absence of a parent were more likely to exhibit behavioral problems.

Overall, seven percent of respondents in this survey listed the effects of deployments on children as their top military issue of concern, comparable to last year's findings in which the issue ranked in the top five. And, while many military spouses reported feeling that they are capable of caring for military children during deployment and the absence of the military parent, others still felt more assistance and resources are needed to help children manage the stresses of a deployment. Half of the spouses (fifty percent) felt they had the resources to deal with the impact of deployments on their military children. However, twenty-three percent did not feel they did and twenty-seven percent were unsure if they had these services.

Twenty-eight percent of respondents felt the level of support provided by the DoD during a deployment was adequate while forty percent felt it was not. When asked about their surrounding community, forty-one percent of respondents felt their civilian communities do not embrace opportunities to help military children deal with the challenges of having their service member parent deployed.



The resiliency of children who experience deployments was a serious concern for survey respondents. Thirty-five percent reported they had sought counseling for themselves or at least one child to help deal with negative emotional impacts of deployment. In the open-ended questions, many expressed worries related to such extended separations, especially emotional and behavioral consequences. Thirty percent of respondents said deployments have negatively affected their children while fifty-two said there were some negative effects, but some positive ones as well. However, respondents also mentioned the possibility of positive effects in their children as a result of military life, including experiencing different cultures and people, adaptability and independence, and appreciation of the sacrifice the military parent has made.

Mental health providers are often ill equipped to meet the unique therapeutic needs of military children, requiring specific training in how to serve military children and adolescents.[5] Access to mental health care remains a challenge, as the military health care plan does not always cover the treatment required. Often, parents in military families may not recognize the symptoms of underlying behavioral problems and not

seek treatment.[6] Additionally, the negative stigma attached to seeking mental health care hinders families from seeking help.

Recommendations for Mitigating the Effects of Deployments

- Support peer-to-peer mentoring programs for military children, such as the Military Child Education Coalition's (MCEC) student mentoring program.
- Expand insurance coverage for mental health wellness visits.
- Actively engage communities in embracing and supporting military families through targeted programming such as The Community Blueprint Network.
- Actively engage national associations of mental health providers for continuing education and research focused on the military family experience.
- Bring awareness to and support for new counseling education graduate programs in higher education as well as their coordination with the DoD, the VA, and the military community.
- Develop more coping and communication skills programs specifically for military children.

The Military Child & Education

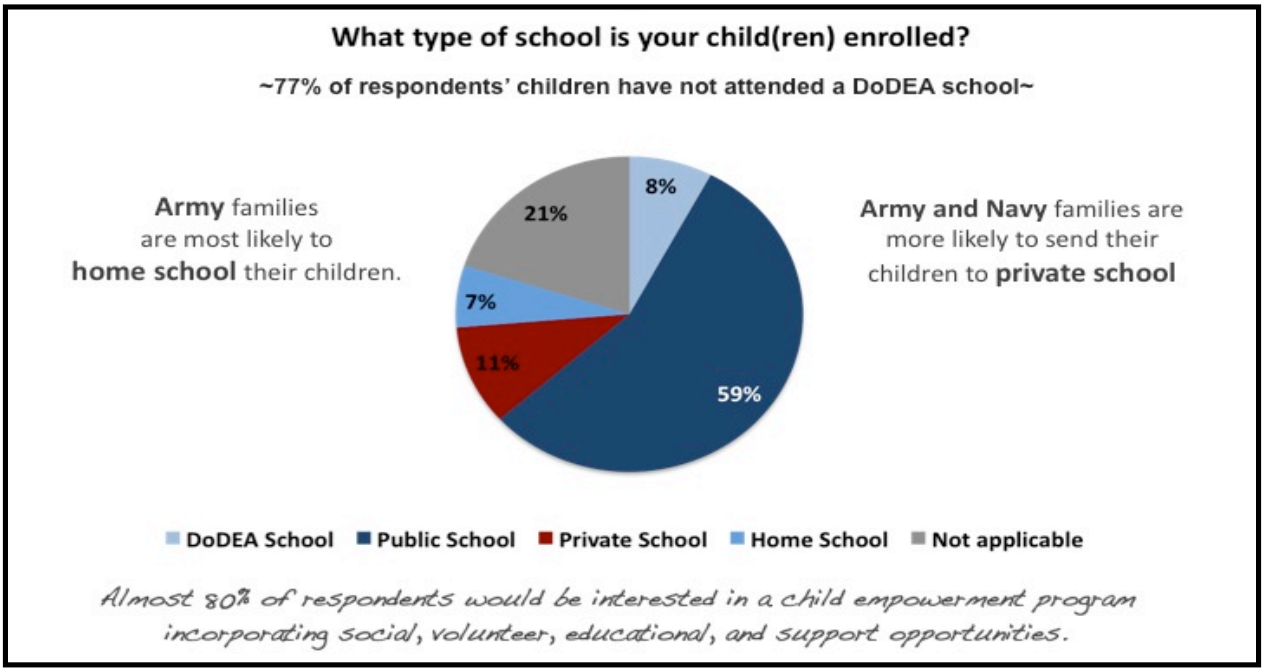
The military family lifestyle presents significant challenges to military children's educational attainment because of frequent moves and deployments that can inhibit academic progress, present social challenges and initiate emotional uncertainty in many children. Numbering over two million worldwide, the majority of military children are school age and attend public schools. [78] Consistent with DoD reports, fifty-nine percent of survey respondents reported that their children attend public school, and eleven percent reported their children attend private school. Eight percent of respondents reported that their children attend Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) schools, and seven percent that their children were home schooled.

Compared to their civilian counterparts, military children are homeschooled at a higher rate; seven percent compared to three percent of civilian children. On average, most military children transfer schools between six and nine times during primary and secondary educational years, which may contribute to higher rates of homeschooling within the military community as parents seek consistency for their children's education. [9] Nationwide in 2007, eleven percent of American children were enrolled in private education, which is the same as the DoD reported rate of military children in private schools.[10] In this survey, Army families were most likely to both home school their children (thirty-nine percent) and send their children to private schools (thirty-eight percent).

As can be seen from these figures, military families are actively pursuing other options for education when the local schools do not meet their children's educational needs. Home schooling offers the stability of instruction and portability across state lines during frequent moves and reinforces a strong family unit. Private schools often offer smaller class sizes and lower teacher/student ratios. Additional 'soft' services are more easily accessible in private schools, such as personal guidance and mentoring, and academically rigorous coursework, such as Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) programming.[11]

Consistently a top concern for military families, the quality of children's education is directly impacted by frequent moves and the service member's time away from home.[12] Parents worry that their children's developmental, academic and emotional needs are stymied or unmet due to this unique military lifestyle, including exposure to issues of war at young ages due to deployments and combat deaths. Military families are also concerned about the long-term effects of the military family lifestyle on their children's education. The cumulative length of deployments, familiarity with military family culture, and the ease of educational transition amidst frequent moves are prominent themes from survey respondents.

A recent study by RAND found that the cumulative length of deployment, rather than the number of deployments, is strongly related to achievement problems.[13] Students with a parent deployed longer than nineteen months cumulatively had lower test scores than students who had a parent deployed less than nineteen months or did not have a parent deploy at all. The RAND study notes that deployment can also increase stress in a military child as well as generate additional responsibilities at home – all of which can have a negative impact on academic performance.



Forty-seven percent of respondents reported that their children's schools do not find opportunities to celebrate and include the service member in the classroom, just one example of a strategy that could be utilized within the educational system to relate to a military child. Often, civilian school administrators and educators are not aware of the unique challenges faced by military families, especially children reacting to a deployment cycle. Research shows that the emotional stress of the military family lifestyle can manifest in disciplinary problems in the classroom, subsequently impacting educational achievement.[14] Even if teachers are aware of the issues, they may not understand the best course of action to support the student, a fact that is disconcerting given that sixty-three percent of respondents reported that their school did not use the Military School Liaison, a role filled at military installations across the country to coordinate educational opportunities and information to help military children succeed academically.

In this survey, ninety-two percent of spouses with children were confident they could help their child make positive in-school decisions regarding their child's future during a service member's deployment. However, even though many military children with a deployed parent prefer to stay at school participating in after-school activities, sixty-four percent of parents reported that, during the absence of a military parent, their children's participation in extra-curricular activities is negatively affected.[15] Almost eighty percent of respondents would be interested in a child empowerment program specifically for military children, incorporating social, volunteer, and educational and support opportunities, thus providing more nurturing for their military children.

The educational and emotional needs of military children are distinct from their civilian peers, but their parents' concerns share a common theme with their civilian counterparts: a strong desire to ensure the educational success and emotional stability of their children. Great progress has been made with the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, an effort to see that military children are not penalized or delayed in achieving their educational goals because of inflexible administrative practices, and whose stated goal is to "Replace the widely varying treatment of transitioning military students to a unified, comprehensive approach that would provide uniform policy in every school district in every state that chooses to join the Compact."[16] However, even though forty-two states have signed onto the compact to date, many survey respondents expressed unfamiliarity with this initiative in their open-ended responses. Other parents expressed continued frustration with the limited portability of student records and the impediment of student achievement caused by moves from state to state.

Continuing to solicit support for this initiative from the non-participating states and incorporating a comprehensive awareness campaign within the military family population and the educational system in the U.S. could help alleviate the uncertainty about what the compact is and how it can be applied to better serve military children. For example, in accordance with Dr. Jill Biden's "Operation Educate the Educators," several universities have taken the initiative to ensure educators are prepared to respond to the unique educational and social emotional concerns of military-connected students by implementing course work and strategies into the teacher education and mental health curriculum.[17] This focus in higher education exemplifies how educators can be knowledgeable and responsive before they even enter a school setting.

Education Recommendations

- Work with the Department of Education to increase training for educators about military children.
- Support the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children at the state level through both additional state participation as well as implementation at the state level through formations of state commissions and allocations of state funds. Additionally, raise awareness of the Compact with military parents and civilian educators so they understand the requirements of the compact.
- Develop curriculum and lesson plans to discuss deployment and current military action so that military children and their civilian peers can process these abstract ideas more easily.
- Work with school systems to build awareness of and access to the Military School Liaison program.
- At the university level, support universities who are focusing on the education of military connected students in their teacher education and mental health programs with initiatives such as "Operation Educate the Educators."

Childcare

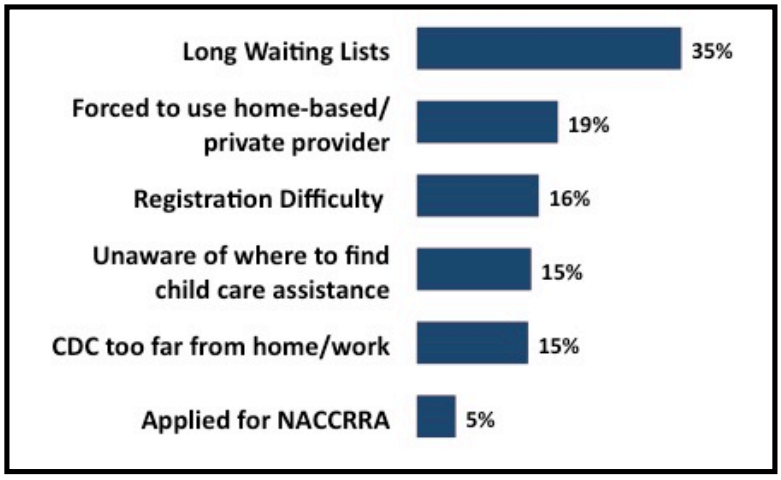
Of all spouse and service member respondents, fifty-four percent had minor children living at home and among those respondents who reported the use of full-time childcare, nearly one third (thirty-two percent) had a child enrolled in an installation-based Child Development Center (CDC). Just over half of respondents reported that they were satisfied with the childcare options provided by the DoD. Among those respondents who were seeking work, satisfaction with childcare options was lower, as shown below.

Satisfaction with Childcare Availability by Working Status

Spouse Working Status	Percentage of Those Who Were Satisfied/Unsatisfied
Satisfied - Working Full Time	52%
Unsatisfied - Working Full Time	48%
Satisfied - Working Part Time	54%
Unsatisfied - Working Part Time	46%
Satisfied - Looking for Work	46%
Unsatisfied - Looking for Work	54%

The open-ended responses revealed the difficulties spouses looking for work have finding quality, affordable childcare. The requirement that one must be employed full-time or enrolled in school full-time to qualify for use of the CDC was seen as an impediment to employment. As one spouse wrote, "I was required to show proof of employment before access - which is counterintuitive. As a professional, I would make sure my child is cared for before turning down a medical office or a university teaching position due to lack of child care." Another said, "I chose not to use CDC because they require the non-military spouse to work full time or attend school full time within a specific time period, and I did not feel I would be able to secure fulltime employment within the 3 month time frame."

Frequency of Reported Difficulties in Accessing Installation-Based Childcare



Just over half (fifty-one percent) of respondents who use childcare reported that the difficult registration processes and long waiting lists were the top challenges to securing care at installation CDCs. After each Permanent Change of Station (PCS), service members must re-register their children for care at their new duty station, filling out all of the same physical paper work they had already filled out during an appointment at the Youth Services Central Office at their

previous base. Service member families are guaranteed care as part of the PCS, but with each PCS they are placed on the waiting list for care at their new duty station, which can have a substantial waiting time. Each household that uses the CDC must also make an annual appointment at their installation's Youth Services Central Office annually to re-fill out all of the same physical paperwork. This paperwork is quite extensive and includes some information that does not change from year-to-year.

The National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NAACRA) operates a childcare fee assistance program to subsidize the cost of non-installation based childcare for military families. Each branch of service funds the subsidy individually, and some branches provide a greater subsidy amount and offer the benefit more widely to families than others.[18] The limited nature of the NAACRA program, reimbursement issues for childcare providers, and the NAACRA registration process were identified in open-ended responses as issues that require attention.

Childcare Recommendations

- Allow families with a spouse actively seeking full-time employment to be placed on waiting lists and in care at the CDCs. Spouses are reluctant or unable to accept job offers if they are unsure if or when they will have full-time childcare available.
- Streamline the CDC registration process throughout the DoD. This process could be simplified through a web-based DoD-wide system that automatically updates service member information (such as rank), and that requests a web-based annual update for all other required information. Supporting documentation (such as spouse W-2s for income verification, minor dependent shot records, etc.), could be scanned in, faxed or dropped off at the Youth Services Central Office.

Exceptional Family Member Program

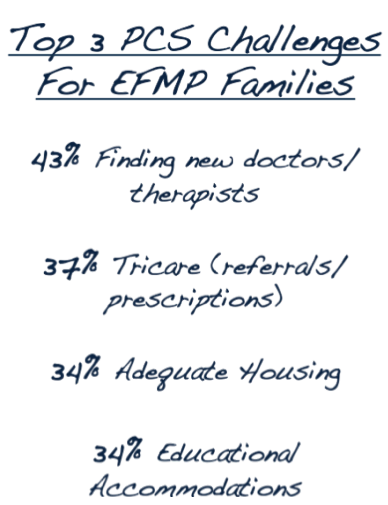
In addition to the more widely known challenges of the military family lifestyle, such as frequent moves and deployments, some military families are also caring for a family member with special needs, which includes its own set of associated challenges. The EFMP is a DoD enrollment program that works with other military and civilian agencies to provide comprehensive and coordinated community support, housing, educational, medical and personnel services worldwide to military families with special needs.

Seventeen percent of respondents said their family was currently enrolled in the EFMP, while thirteen percent said that they were not currently enrolled but thought their family would qualify. This rate of enrollment is comparable to the Health Care Survey of DoD Beneficiaries (HCSDB), a periodic survey administered to beneficiaries worldwide since 1995, and to a nationally representative sample of children with chronic conditions of fifteen to sixteen percent.[19,20] A 2004 HCSDB survey found that twenty-three percent of TRICARE Prime enrollees seventeen years old or younger have special health care needs consisting of prescription medications and services targeting medical, mental health and educational needs.[21]

Military family respondents with special needs family members manage a number of different health care needs and in many cases are coping with multiple diagnoses: thirty-one percent have a speech or language impairment; twenty-nine percent are autistic; twenty-eight percent experience developmental delay;

twenty-five percent experience emotional disturbances; twenty-two percent have a specific learning disability; nineteen percent have a physical disability; nine percent have an intellectual disability; six percent have a visual impairment including blindness; six percent are hearing impaired; two percent have a traumatic brain injury; and one percent experience deaf-blindness.

Meeting the educational needs of the exceptional family member is a challenge, but one families are able to cope with by taking advantage of the special programs and resources available in local communities and in the public school systems. Over the past several years the DoD has made significant progress with assisting families who are enrolled in EFMP, including the hiring of School Liaison Officers and EFMP Case Managers for service branches. In this survey, military families with an exceptional family member were more likely to enroll their children in a public school (sixty-six percent) or to home school (eleven percent) than those military families without special needs (fifty-nine percent and seven percent, respectively). Interestingly, while seventy-eight percent of EFMP families supported a peer-to-peer support system/mentorship program, in open-ended responses many respondents cited a lack of peer support systems in place to help their children through frequent moves and deployments.



Meeting the unique emotional needs of an exceptional family member has been increasingly challenging given the OPTEMPO over the last decade. Previous research has found that exceptional family members and their families often encounter obstacles in accessing health care, education and long-term support services.[22] And, in this survey, the top PCS challenges cited by EFMP families involved securing medical and educational accommodations. Given the added challenges EFMP families face when they relocate, is not surprising these military families reported negative emotional impacts of deployments and frequent moves on military children with special needs. Thirty-nine percent of EFMP family members reported that multiple moves and deployments have negatively or significantly negatively affected their child compared to thirty percent of families without an exceptional family member. Additionally, the majority of respondents reported their EFMP child(ren) were not able to cope with the OPTEMPO and frequent change inherent in the military family lifestyle. In the open-ended responses, EFMP military families articulated that the DoD support system is not adequately helping youth deal with deployment. However, fifty-six percent of these military families had not sought counseling for deployment related stress.

While the design of the EFMP is meant to meet the mental, emotional, and medical needs of exceptional family members as well as the professional needs of the service member's career, twenty percent of respondents said being enrolled in the EFMP has had a negative effect on their service member's career. Additionally, the added responsibilities related to managing the special needs of an EFMP family member coupled with the already challenging military family lifestyle, often prevents the military spouse from working outside the home.[23] These employment obstacles and the strain of managing an EFMP family make the decision to stay in the military difficult; although, the health benefits provided under TRICARE for exceptional family members often are an incentive to forestall separation or retirement for the sponsor.[24]

Care-giving

Some of our military families find themselves caring for a child or family member who would otherwise require permanent placement in a facility outside of the home. For example, a parent caring for his wounded, veteran child or a service member or military spouse caring for a physically or mentally challenged minor child or elderly parent. Respite care provides temporary relief for those who are caring for these family members. This is an important issue because our family members may not receive regular breaks from care-giving, which could cause them to experience health and social consequences over time.[25]

Nine percent of respondents reported utilizing some type of respite care. Respondents used respite care for a variety of reasons, though the most often cited reasons were to regroup and rejuvenate (seventy-nine percent) and to run errands (sixty-two percent). Other respondents used respite care to build relationships with other members of their family (sixty percent) and attend doctor's appointments (fifty-one percent). Some additional benefits of respite care were allowing respondents to go to special events for other members of the family (forty-nine percent), sleep (forty-one percent), attend other regularly scheduled events (thirty percent), engage in hobbies (twenty-six percent), and obtain higher education (twenty percent). Seventeen percent of respondents said they made use of respite care to prevent harm to either themselves or their children. Of respondents who reported utilizing respite care for a family member, fifty-five percent required care for a child, and the majority of these (eighty-three percent) were children with special needs.

Interestingly, twenty-five percent of respondents stated that they requested respite care for their parents. As the nation at large faces an increase in the percentage of older citizens, military families are also caring for aging parents. Additionally, when looking for resources for respite care, the forty-seven percent of survey respondents indicated they had in-home care with a provider who had training related to their family member's special needs – either specialized training, a certification, or a LPN/RN. Thirty-six percent utilized a family member or friend, and ten percent used respite providers within a care facility.

EFMP and Care-giving Recommendations

- Provide training and information for mental health issues like PTS and TBI that returning veterans and their families will face. Explaining these conditions to, and including, family members assists caregivers in planning for veterans' transitions from patient to citizen.
- Provide a toll-free 24-hour phone line with support, information, and referral to reflect that care-giving is a 24-hour a day job.
- Continuously and periodically train health care providers and case managers to be sensitive and empathetic to the needs of caregivers. Caregivers play a vital role in providing care to veterans.
- Continue to support the service member after enrollment in the EFMP, provide follow-up to ensures the service member is seeking assistance when needed from the EFMP Coordinator.
- Focus on education and awareness of the benefits and resources like the EFMP Case Managers and School Liaisons, available for the exceptional military families.
- Encourage and support the development of informal networks of EFMP families at installations.
- Continue and support the development of portable careers and virtual employment for military spouses.

SATISFACTION WITH THE MILITARY AND RELATED SERVICE/BENEFIT OFFERINGS

While in the military, service members and families enjoy many services and benefits as part of their service member's affiliation with the armed services. The survey findings point to five family services as having the most relevance to the military population, as each service was answered and ranked by seventy-five percent of respondents: TRICARE Insurance; Quality of Health Care; Access to Health Care; Commissary & Exchange; and Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR). Only one other service of the fourteen services exceeded the sixty percent response mark for respondents, which was availability of base housing.

Of these services, the Commissary and Exchange was the only one that had a clear majority of people experiencing some level of satisfaction, with fifty-eight percent answering that they were satisfied. Only two other services had more people communicating satisfaction than being unsatisfied or neutral: MWR (forty-five percent of respondents were satisfied to some degree) and TRICARE Insurance (fifty percent of respondents were satisfied). It should be noted that Exchanges give two-thirds of proceeds back to MWR and other quality of life services at installations.[26] This is a meaningful connection to make when examining shopping habits of military members as it impacts the manner in which MWR programs are funded.

Respondents expressed either no satisfaction or dissatisfaction with Quality of Health Care (forty-nine percent), Availability of Base Housing (forty-seven percent), and Access to Health Care (forty-seven percent). Further understanding of health care factors such as access, quality and insurance provider networks requires more exploration as health care remains an important component of a service member's decision to join or, after they join, to remain in the military. Other areas with no satisfaction or dissatisfaction were Financial Counseling (thirty-nine percent), Quality of Base Housing (thirty-eight percent), and Mental Health Services (thirty-six percent).

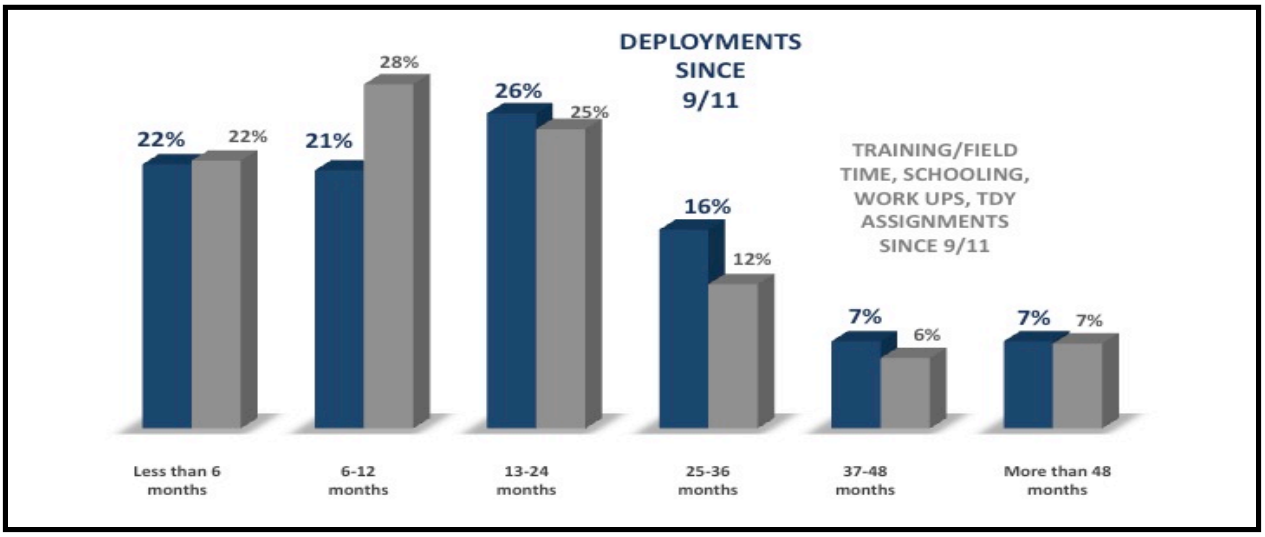
Service Satisfaction Recommendations

- Involve military families in reviews of programming and services for evaluation of effectiveness, usage, and satisfaction. As budgetary restrictions apply, provide context and rationale for shifts in funding.
- Further review of all facets of the military health care experience - to include issues such as access, quality, and interaction with provider networks - to provide a broader conceptualization of military families' use and satisfaction of this benefit.

DEPLOYMENTS & WELLNESS

Eighty percent of spouse respondents reported that their service member had been deployed during their marriage. The majority of spouses were able to communicate frequently with their spouse during deployment, with twenty-six percent reporting that they communicated with their service member daily. Forty-five percent were in touch their service member a couple of times a week, and fifteen percent reported communication just once a week.

Trainings and TDY's are significant contributors to family separations. Deployments account for only half of the total amount of time service members have spent away from their families since September 11, 2001.



Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post-Traumatic Stress (PTS)

Traumatic Brain Injuries are caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or a penetrating head injury that disrupts the normal function of the brain. TBI is a major public health issue in the United States, commonly resulting from car crashes and sports accidents.[27] Exposure to improvised explosive device (IED) attacks is a common cause of TBI among Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) veterans. Post Traumatic Stress can occur after someone goes through a traumatic event like combat, assault, or disaster.[28]

A minority of spouse respondents reported that their service member had been diagnosed with TBI (three percent) or PTS (eleven percent). However, just over a quarter of spouse respondents (twenty-six percent) felt that regardless of diagnosis, their service member had displayed symptoms of PTS. Of the respondents who reported that their service member had exhibited symptoms of PTS only thirty-five percent indicated that their service member had sought treatment through a military treatment provider.

Did your family seek intervention or treatment through a military provider for your service member's PTS?

Response	Frequency
Yes	35%
No	62%
Prefer not to answer	3%

When the sixty-two percent of the respondents with service members diagnosed or exhibiting symptoms of PTS were prompted to explain why they did not seek treatment with a military provider, "Lack of Confidentiality" received the highest response rate with "Prefer Not to Answer" coming in second. The table below provides a breakdown of why service members chose not to seek treatment.

What was the reason you did not seek treatment?
Check all that apply

	Response (%)
Lack of Confidentiality	86%
Prefer not to answer	74%
Service Member Refusal/Denial	58%
Good services were not conveniently available	45%
Unable to afford private counseling	40%
Fear Negative Impact to Career	15%
No Time Provided (OPTEMPO)	11%
Negative Image of Seeking Treatment	9%
Command Not Supportive	7%

The third highest response for lack of treatment was the service member denying that they had PTS symptoms, but the spouse witnessing symptoms that they felt were consistent with PTS. In some of these cases, the spouse reported that the PTS symptoms were mild and the service member was "coping" with them without assistance. In many of these cases, the spouse reported confronting the service member about behaviors they believed were PTS related, but the service member refused to believe they had the disorder at any level. As one spouse reported, "He doesn't think he has it and his 'symptoms' are probably not clinically significant -- they are very mild. But, in my opinion, it still affects our quality of life."

The second set of factors preventing service members from seeking treatment for PTS all involve some negative aspect of seeking help - these included the direct lack of support from a command, a lack of time in work schedules, the "negative image" associated with acknowledging the need and seeking treatment, as well as the fear of the impact on the service member's career. Similar factors can be seen later in this report, when addressing the issue of suicide.

Research reveals that among those diagnosed with PTS but not receiving treatment, an "invalidating socio-cultural environment" and a lack of knowledge about the disorder are central barriers to accessing treatment.[29] This survey also found a lack of command support, lack of time to access counseling, and fear of reputation degradation prevent service members from seeking treatment for PTS. This appears to be particularly true for service members who experience some PTS symptoms, but who are able to conceal these symptoms effectively in their day-to-day work environment. Recognizing commands that create a culture of trust and allow service members the time to seek treatment as needed may raise the awareness of the need for command-level support. While programs such as the Naval Center Combat and Operational Stress Control (NCCOSC) are focusing on educating service members and promoting best practices to treat operational stress concerns, survey respondents highlighted the continued need for strategic treatment and education programs to dispel myths and decrease the stigma surrounding PTS, TBI, and psychological health.

Open-ended Responses For Not Seeking Treatment

Lack of Command Support

"Issues with command allowing soldier to seek time for help and being understanding."

"Command didn't think he needed it and didn't make time available for help."

"Even though the Army has been pushing to get help and trying to stop suicides there are very toxic leaders that affect our husbands despite all the help that the higher up leaders push."

Stigma Associated With Seeking Treatment

"My husband did not want to be labeled or somehow "excused" from the military after 16 years of service with no retirement."

"Seeking counseling is often seen as a weakness to a soldier in a leadership position, and is often accompanied by a negative stigma. I did not seek counseling for my PTSD, and my husband will not while he is on active-duty for his."

"He is embarrassed to go and talk to someone since he has been in the service over 36 years."

"Because of the stigma associated with PTS, my husband has been hesitant to acknowledge his needs."

Adverse Effects to Career

"The Army is changing and it gets harder and harder to stay in. If our soldier were to be actually diagnosed with PTSD, we know it could affect his career."

"My spouse was concerned about the impact of seeking treatment on his career, and doesn't think the medical community can do anything to help him."

"It affects job evaluation. Higher command individuals are more susceptible to being removed from job."

"He was not about to admit that there was a problem, he's trained to just deal with whatever feelings he experiences. He saw or experienced something that bothered him, but he would have been ostracized if his fellow aviators found out that he was troubled."

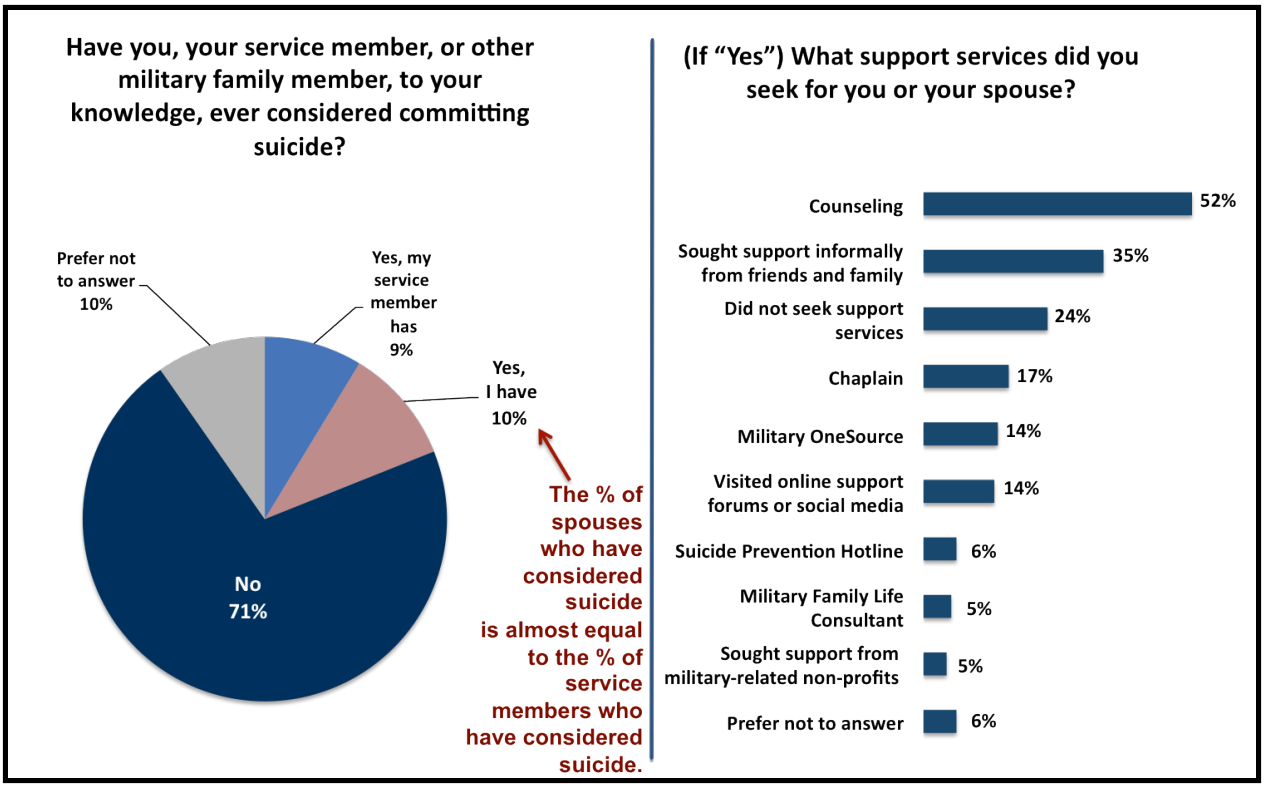
TBI/PTS Recommendations

- Recognize commands that provide exceptional support for service members dealing with PTS.
- Provide confidential avenues for spouses who feel their service member is exhibiting symptoms of PTS to express their concerns. Spouses need information on how to locate resources and information that may enable their service members to better come to terms with their symptoms and seek the appropriate confidential treatment.
- Create mandatory post-deployment counseling, requiring every returning service member to work with a professional counselor for a period of time after deployment.

Suicide

According to Harvard Magazine, "about twelve percent of Americans report having had suicidal thoughts at some point in their lives… over the course of a lifetime, five percent of people attempt suicide, and about 1.4 percent of the U.S. population die this way."[30] Similarly, RAND found, "in 2008, close to 12 percent of active-duty military personnel reported having seriously considered suicide in the past."[31]

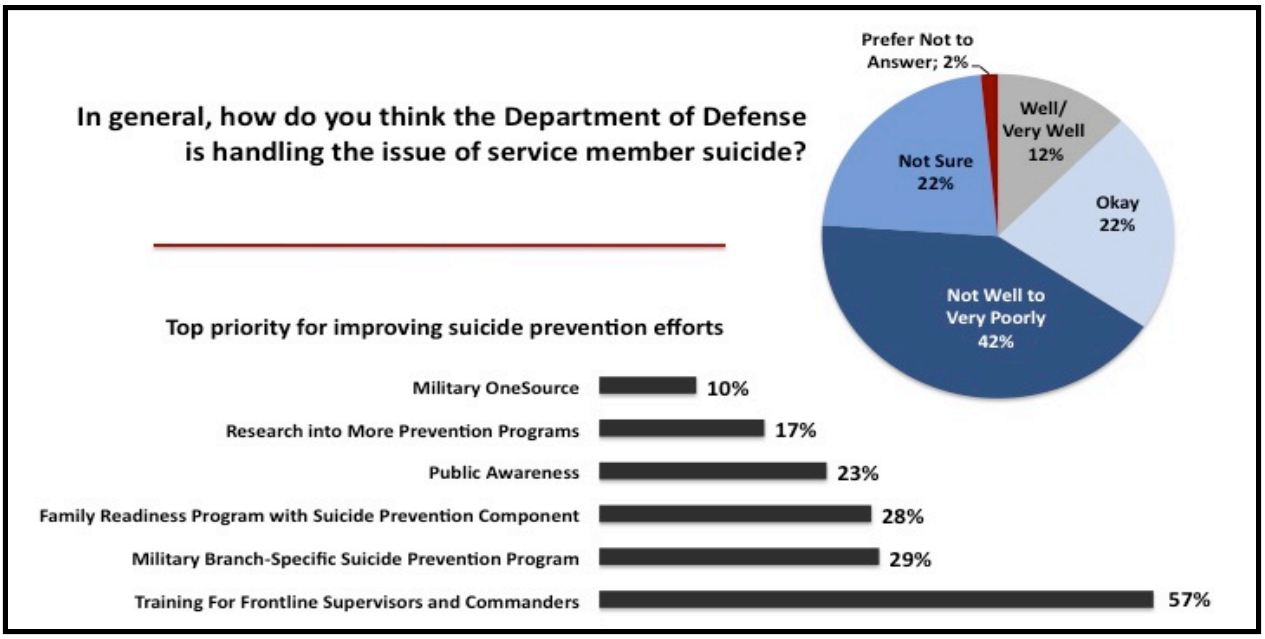
The information garnered from this year's survey respondents demonstrates the military is similar to the civilian population with regard to suicidal thoughts and actions. The number of survey respondents who indicated they knew their active duty service member had contemplated suicide was nine percent (with little variation between branches), while ten percent of spouses reported they had themselves considered it. While these numbers are lower than the Harvard or RAND findings, our survey also showed ten percent of respondents preferred not to answer the question at this time. Consequently, the actual percentage of military members who have considered suicide is probably higher than the reported numbers.



In terms of how the military community leadership is responding to the issue of suicide, perception varied among respondents. Seventy percent of Army-affiliated respondents agreed that the Army is either "a little helpful," "very helpful," or "acceptable" at addressing the issue of suicide, while slightly less than forty percent of Army National Guard respondents agreed with these categories. Marine Corps-affiliated respondents were the most satisfied with their branch's focus on the issue of suicide, with eighty percent considering the service either "a little helpful," "very helpful," or "acceptable." The Air Force had a much lower percentage of people who listed it as being "a little helpful to very helpful," with only twenty-eight

percent of affiliated respondents. Regrettably, fifteen suicides were reported through late January while in all of 2011, the Air Force recorded a total of twenty-nine suicides.[32]

Of those family members who had experience with suicide, slightly more than half had reached out for counseling, yet the others had not. When reviewing the qualitative comments from the respondents about what military leaders should do concerning suicide, more than twenty-three percent of comments cited the need to eradicate the stigma that still surrounds seeking mental health support or counseling. The second most prevalent comment cited leadership engagement. Military members and their families are concerned military careers will be negatively impacted or even end due to the need for counseling and the perception (real or imagined) of the lack of confidentiality along with the stigma of asking for help. Military members' concerns about how their military leadership will react to requests for mental health – for suicide, PTSD or other issues – results in mental health issues being buried rather than addressed.



These results indicate that the leadership of all branches of the military still have a great deal of work to do in order to remove the perceived stigma military members feel when they request assistance – either when returning from deployment or at other points during their careers. Indeed, many comments mentioned leaders telling military members to "suck it up," or "soldier up." Leaders could also address other suggestions from respondents including establishing mandatory counseling, particularly upon return from a deployment. Importantly, as the Army's 2010 study showed, it is not just deployments that require members to seek help; of those Guard soldiers who had committed suicide, fifty percent had never been deployed.[33] That such a large number of suicides were not related directly to deployment suggests other contributing factors. For example, over fifty percent of those who committed suicide were experiencing significant relationship problems.[34] New research into the Army's parallel rise of those soldiers who experience mental health disorders and the numbers of suicides supports the concept of focusing on overall mental health to help address the issue of suicide prevention.[35]

Suicide Prevention Recommendations

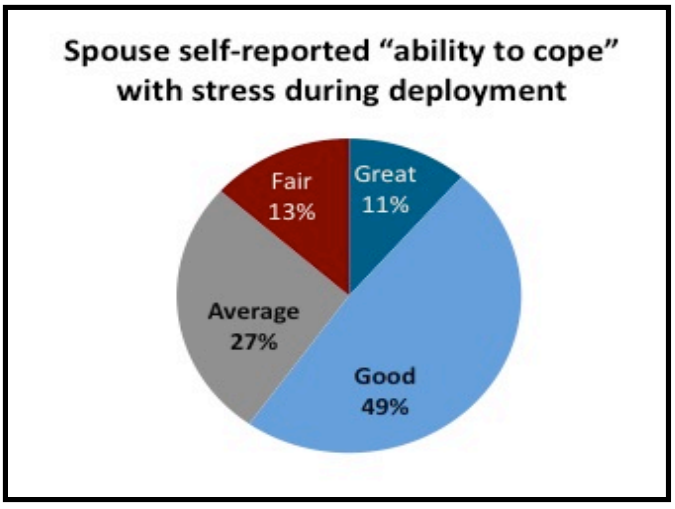
- Employ meaningful and deliberate leadership techniques to begin to dispel the stigma that asking for help is a sign of weakness. Senior leaders at both the officer and NCO levels should participate in mandatory counseling sessions – where their troops can see them entering and leaving the offices. Having senior leaders share stories about requesting help may empower those who need it to step forward and also may silence those who mock the value of mental health care.
- Military spouse suicides should be tracked. According to a study by the New England Journal of Medicine, spouses are more likely to attempt suicide based on the number of deployments of their active duty member.* There is currently no one source for the number of military spouse suicides, which severely limits the ability to understand and prevent the occurrence within the spouse population.

**Mansfield, A., Kaufman, J. S., Marshall, S. W., Gaynes, B. N., Morrissey, J. P., & Engel, C. C. (2010, January 4). Deployment and the use of mental health services among U.S. Army wives. The New England Journal of Medicine. v. 362, no 2.*

Spouse Well-Being During Deployment

As expected, spouse respondents reported higher stress levels during deployment. However, over half (sixty percent) of all spouse respondents reported that their ability to cope with stress during deployment was "great" or "good," and just over a quarter reported that their ability to cope with deployment related stress was "average."

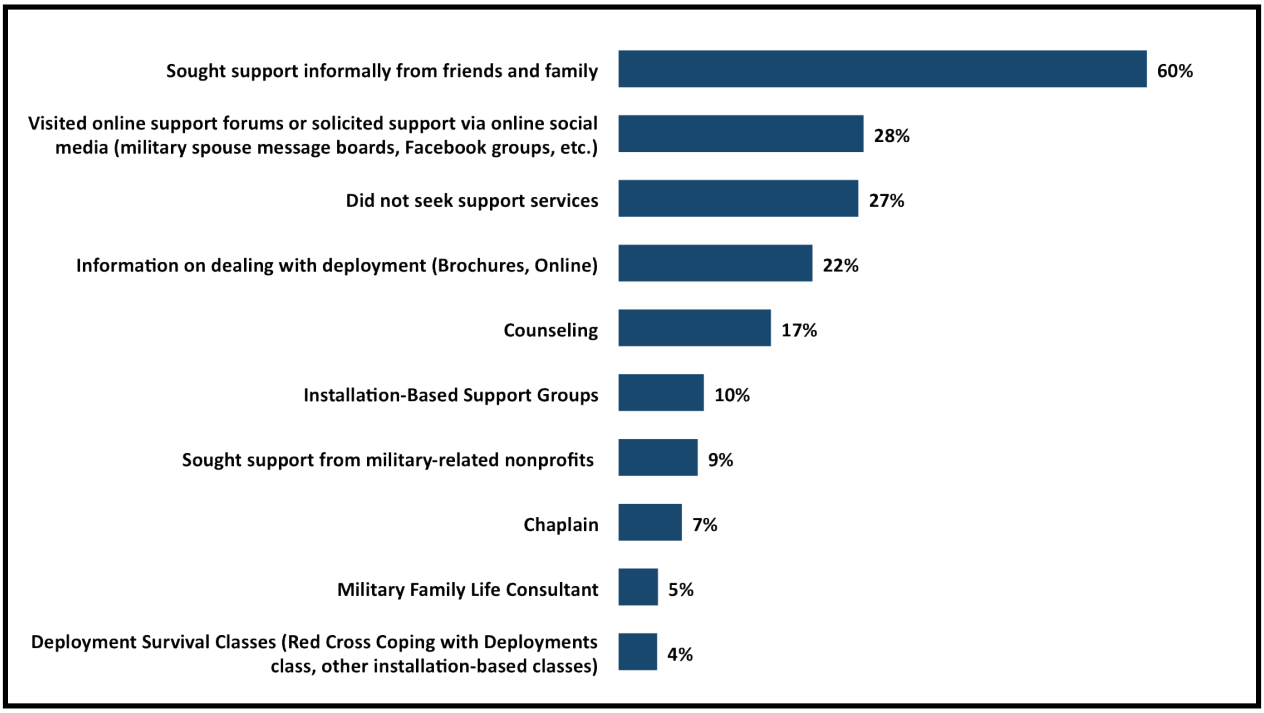
The reported use of informal support services, such as family and friends, was high during deployments. Most commonly, spouses reported that they relied upon the support of friends and family (sixty percent), and as a distant second they reported using online support forums or social media connections (twenty-eight percent) for moral support during their service member's deployment. Twenty-two percent of spouses accessed information on dealing with deployment either online or in brochure form, and seventeen percent of spouses reported seeking counseling for support during deployment.



The reported use of formal deployment support services, including services offered by installation based support groups (ten percent), military-related non-profits (nine percent), Red Cross and installation-based deployment support classes (four percent), and services offered by chaplains (six percent) was

comparatively low. Just over a quarter of spouse respondents reported that they did not seek any form of deployment support services.

Spouse respondents' use of deployment support services



After deployments, the spouse respondent's perception of their service member's ability to reintegrate with their nuclear and extended families, friends, neighbors, and co-workers was overall, relatively positive. However, nearly one-fifth of respondents reported that it was "difficult" or "very difficult" for their service member to reintegrate with their nuclear family – with their spouse and children – following deployment.

Spouse Reported Service Member Reintegration Ability

	Very Easy and Easy	Neither Easy Nor Difficult	Difficult and Very Difficult
His/Her Parents	60%	27%	13%
His/Her Spouse	64%	17%	19%
His/Her Children	64%	17%	19%
His/Her Extended Family	56%	32%	12%
His/Her Friends	64%	25%	10%
His/Her Co-workers	66%	25%	8%
His/Her Neighbors	61%	32%	7%

Spousal Relationships and Well-Being

Martial satisfaction among spouse respondents was high. Eighty-six percent reported that they were "very happy" or "happy" with their marriages, while only eight percent reported being unhappy in their marriage. Just over a quarter of respondents reported that they work out arguments with some difficulty, indicating the need for the DoD to continue offering classes and other services aimed at reducing marital discord and divorce and focusing on healthy relationship behaviors. Currently a majority of marriage retreats, classes, and services are provided by the Chaplain's Corp. Expansion of the channels used to offer these services, including the utilization of non-religious based curriculum, could attract a broader audience.

Only a small minority of spouse survey respondents (three percent) reported that their day-to-day stress level was "out of control." Among respondents that reported significant household financial stress levels or that they felt that their service member had exhibited symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress (regardless of diagnosis), there were higher reported stress levels. Respondents in these two categories reported "out of control" stress levels only slightly more than all respondents, but those reporting "high, but I can cope" stress levels were substantially higher than all respondents.

Spouse Day-to-Day Stress Levels

	All Respondents	Significant Financial Stress Levels	PTS Service Member Respondents
Out of control	3%	4%	5%
High, but I can cope	33%	40%	46%
Manageable	48%	47%	41%
Low	15%	9%	7%

Similarly, the reported levels of feeling threatened or afraid or of being verbally or physical abused by their service member was higher among those respondents who indicated they felt that their service member exhibited symptoms of PTS. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), rates of intimate partner violence among active duty service members and veterans are believed to be three times higher than those found in the civilian population.[36] Teten et al. examined rates of intimate partner violence among OIF/OEF and Vietnam Veterans who reported experiencing symptoms of PTS and those that did not.[37] While the study contained a small sample size, it found a significant correlation between PTS diagnosis and rates of partner violence. The study notes that the "odds ratios suggested that male OEF/OIF veterans with PTS were approximately 1.9 to 3.1 times more likely to perpetrate aggression toward their female partners and 1.6 to 6 times more likely to report experiencing female perpetrated aggression than the other two groups."

Reported Spousal Abuse (All Respondents and PTS Service Member Respondents)

	All Respondents	PTS Service Member Respondents
Reported feeling threatened or afraid of Service Member	5%	12%
Reported being verbally harassed by Service Member "Often" or Sometimes"	11%	25%
Reported being physically hurt by Service Member "Often or "Sometimes"	1%	3%

The relationship between aggression and PTS is well documented, and the survey's findings are consistent with existing academic literature. However, it should be noted that not *all* veterans with PTS commit physical or verbal abuse. The rates of domestic violence among service members with PTS, and what drives some of those diagnosed with PTS to commit acts of domestic violence but not others, are still topics under evaluation.[38] The higher rates of spousal stress and abuse among those who reported that their service member exhibits signs of PTS may be due in part, and only in part, to the manifestation of the PTS symptoms themselves.

Spouses indicated in the open-ended responses that they often felt PTS-related abuse was not actual abuse, as the PTS symptoms that resulted in abuse were perceived as overcoming the service member's ability to control them and as temporary in nature. In particular, PTS-related night terrors were among the PTS symptoms that were reported as having resulted in physical abuse of the spouse.

There was a small pool of respondents who provided insight into domestic violence within the military. Fewer than five percent of respondents indicated that their active duty member either "almost never" or "sometimes" physically abused them. However, there was a slightly larger percentage that replied they were, "often" or "sometimes" verbally abused by their active duty military member (twelve percent).

PTS Night Terrors and Intimate Partner Violence

"My husband would toss and turn in his sleep. Any time I have ever been hit by my husband has been from him thrashing in his sleep. The Veteran Affairs department was not helpful and we are still fighting for him to get better help."

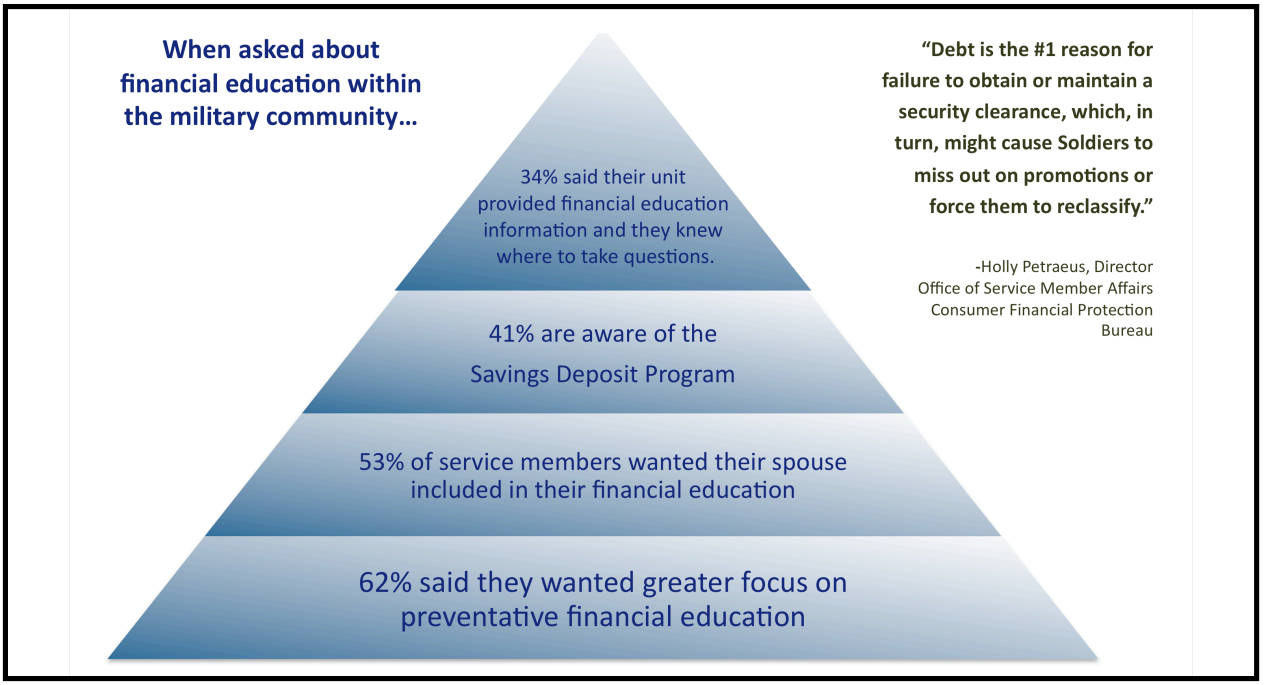
"My husband hits me when he has flashbacks and nightmares, not when he's awake. I don't consider that physical abuse."

"Incidents have been mild, rare and isolated to specific high stress situations (redeployment, etc.); anger level is not consistent or ongoing; but there is concern as to an ongoing pattern of behavior."

FINANCIAL SECURITY & THE FUTURE

Financial Awareness and Preparedness

A new addition to the survey this year was a section specifically focused on financial literacy. As Holly Petraeus, head of the Office of Service Member Affairs in the new Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) has noted, many military service members and their families are seeking greater consumer education to prevent financial pitfalls.[39] Additionally, as security clearance audits take into account the fiscal background of service members, the effects of financial decision-making, especially poor financial decision-making, can adversely impact military careers.



Sixty-eight percent of respondents expressed that they experienced stress from their family's current financial condition. This is of particular importance since high stress levels can have a negative impact on overall psychological well-being and ability to focus on critical tasks at hand.[40] Also, in a time of continued proposed budget cuts, it is no surprise that many families are concerned about their current financial status. In the event of an unexpected expense or loss of income, such as a sickness, job loss, or economic downturn, a majority (fifty-four percent) of the respondents stated that they have not set aside emergency or rainy day funds to cover expenses for at least three months. This is very similar to a recent Financial Industry Regulatory Authority (FINRA) survey, which reported fifty-one percent of the general population stated they had not saved for a rainy day fund.[41] While sixty-eight percent of respondents did report they are contributing to a retirement account, the amount they are contributing and how that might change with the proposed budget cuts are unclear and warrants further study. The majority of respondents also reported having between two and three credit cards with a balance of less than $5,000, which is significantly lower than the national family average of three to four credit cards with a debt of $15,799.[42]

Regarding housing, fifty-nine percent of respondents owned their home. Of those, thirty-eight percent stated they were still in good shape with their mortgage situation and twelve percent reported they were upside down, meaning they owe more than the current value of their home. As so many military families must move every two to four years, foreclosures or non-payment of mortgages can have significant consequences, including possible loss of security clearances or overall career achievement.[43] Under the expansion of the Housing Assistance Program (HAP) in 2009, many military families were able to get some additional support; unfortunately at this time, the funds have been used and no more money is available. While the CFPB has been working diligently to address hardship assistance programs, underwater mortgages still appear to be an important concern for military families. [44]

While only a small percentage of participants reported having any interactions with payday lending, rent to own or check-cashing companies, the respondents who had these interactions reported more negative than positive experiences. Legislation such as the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) and the Dodd-Frank Wall Street and Consumer Protection Act assist in holding lending companies more accountable for predatory lending practices.[45] In addition, a greater emphasis has been put on financial education. Recent studies have shown that financial education is beneficial for household decision-making and correlated with successful retirement.[46] [47]

One-third of respondents agreed a greater focus should be put on preventive financial education. Only nineteen percent of respondents agreed their unit supports financial readiness through education programs. Thirty-four percent knew how to access financial resources within their unit and fifty-three percent of service members agreed that their spouse should be included in financial readiness courses. In 2003, the DoD formed a Financial Readiness Campaign whose mission is to provide education, resources, programs, and support to service members and their families. Nonprofit 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 for our families.

Financial Literacy Recommendations

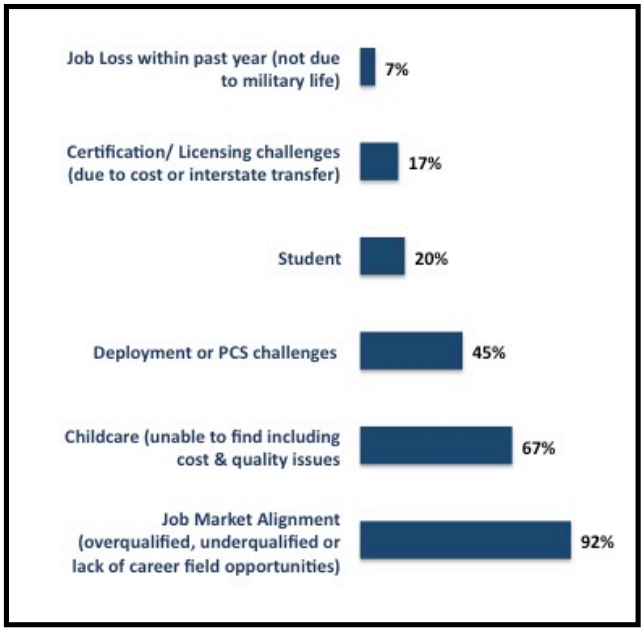
- Encourage greater emphasis at the command level for preventive financial education opportunities for military families. In particular, ensure there are opportunities for military spouses to be included in these discussions for added benefit.
- Expand awareness of the new Office of Service Members' Affairs at the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and its programming designed to help service members and their families plan for their financial futures as well as the initiatives aimed at providing recourse to service members for predatory behavior by private organizations.

Spouse Employment

Fifty-seven percent of military spouse respondents felt being a military spouse had a negative impact on their ability to pursue a career, while only six percent indicated that their military lifestyle has had a positive

impact on their employment. While spouses believe their careers are hampered, the majority of research examining military spouse employment illustrates spouses' desire, and need, to find paid employment. Recent news articles cite various percentages of military spouses who would like to work, ranging from seventy-four percent[48] to eighty percent[49] to ninety-one percent.[50] However, both anecdotal news coverage and empirical research has shown that spouses can be hindered by basic features of the military lifestyle including frequent moves, challenging state laws which require those with licenses or certificates to renew in every new location and additional stresses stemming from deployments and the unique challenges of being a single parent while an active duty spouse is fighting a war.[51] A 2005 RAND study found three-quarters of spouses needed to work to cover basic needs,[52] a US Army War College researcher found eighty-one percent of spouses cite the need to earn money to support their families as a primary driver for finding work,[53] while the DoD reports that eighty-five percent of military spouses need to work.[54]

Reasons for Not Working Outside the Home



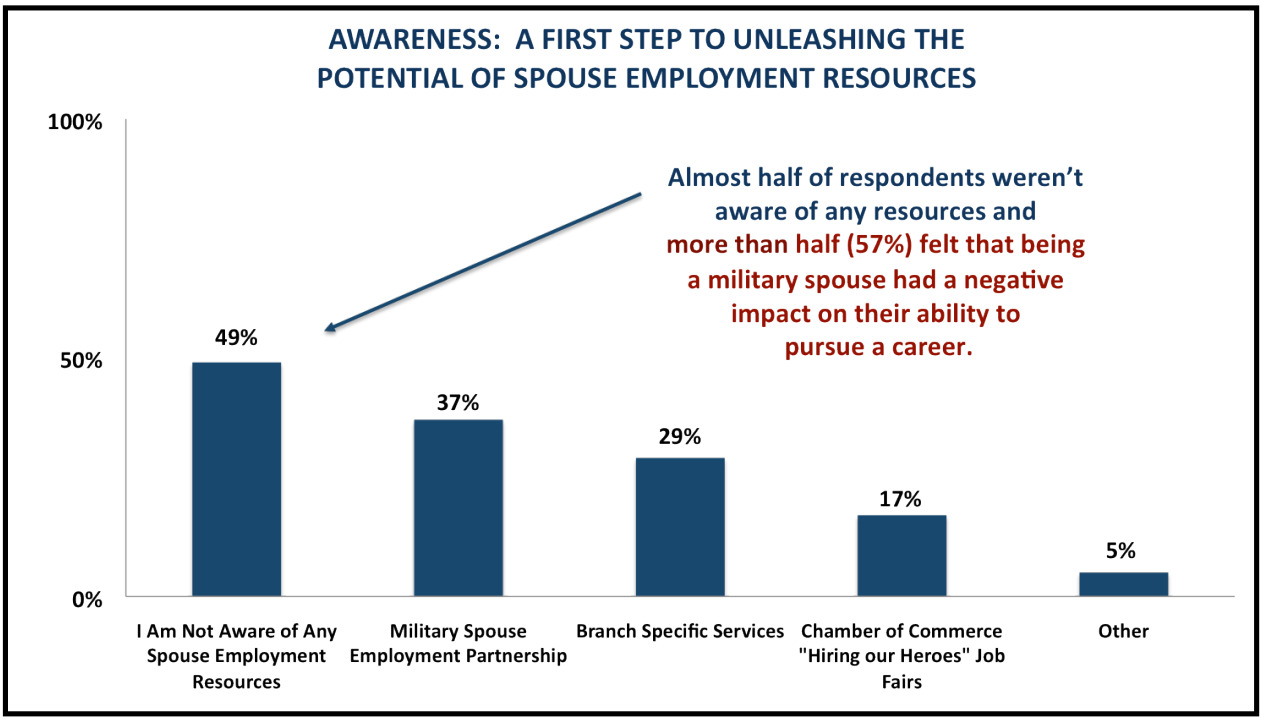
Our survey respondents had similar responses to the overall military spouse population. For example, forty-one percent of spouses were employed outside of the home and of those who were not employed outside of the home, fifty-three percent would have like to be employed. However, given the aforementioned demands of military life, there are many challenges to spouses finding jobs. In this survey, the most often cited challenge is finding alignment within the local job market to the active military member's duty station; typically spouses are overqualified for local jobs or they cannot find a job in their career field. Ninety-two percent of respondents listed job market alignment as a reason for not working.

The second most-cited reason for not working was the issue of childcare. Sixty-seven percent of respondents cited some challenge with childcare – including being unable to find quality childcare, being unable to afford childcare, or not having access to childcare. Forty-five percent of respondents were not working because of issues related to a recent deployment or PCS. Twenty-seven percent of all spouse respondents have faced difficulties with transferring their professional certificates or licenses across state lines (lawyers, doctors, realtors, nurses, teachers, physical therapists, etc.). The graph above indicates seventeen percent of spouses who are not *currently* working cited certificate or licensure challenges.

As military spouses face the expected challenges of military life by attempting to align their skills to their local communities while moving every few years and finding childcare in new locations and so on, they also face unexpected challenges. Almost half of the respondents (forty-eight percent) felt they had not gotten a particular job, been treated differently in terms of pay, benefits, or other workplace treatment because of their military spouse status. One common theme is that employers frequently hesitate or even resist hiring military spouses due to the likelihood that they will move within two to four years; RAND also found this trend in their research.[55] However, given the transiency of the general population within the workplace,

particularly as employers hire more and more "Generation Y" employees, who tend to change employers more than prior generations, employers should be encouraged to let go of that negative perception and fear of unnecessary turnover in their businesses.[56]

There are a multitude of resources for military spouses to leverage while they are seeking employment, yet slightly less than half of our respondents were familiar with any military spouse employment resources. Of the fifty-one percent who were familiar with the available resources, just over one-third had heard of the Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP), while less than one-third were aware of branch-specific services that targeted spouses (such as Fleet & Family Readiness). The new "Hiring Our Heroes" initiative by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce also had some recognition, with seventeen percent of spouses aware that their targeted hiring fairs were not just for veterans, but also for military spouses.



This perception among spouses of being unappealing to local employment communities, under-supported by military services, and feeling at a disadvantage for being overqualified or under-qualified for local jobs may contribute to the twenty-six percent of spouses in the survey who have been or are currently small business owners. Spouses who have small businesses are frequently able to take their businesses and skills across state lines (with the exception of the previously mentioned license/certificate challenges). Additionally, they are able to manage their clients from afar via the Internet, cell phone, and other telecommuting technology. Flexibility is also a draw for spouses who look into the small business arena; they are able to manage their schedules around their military members' deployments, PCS's, and other inflexible and short-noticed activities that are inherent to military life.

Perhaps this background helps explain why thirty-six percent of spouse respondents indicated an interest in pursuing self-employment or starting a business in the future, while another twenty-one percent were unsure if they would like to start a business. This is a prime education opportunity for military spouse

support groups, both governmental and non-governmental. One 2011 entrepreneurial event, which was sponsored by Inc. Magazine and *Joining Forces*, offered applicants an all-day CEO Mentoring Session for military spouse and veteran small business owners; three-quarters of their applicants were military spouses.

The variety of businesses among spouses was striking. Of the twenty-six percent of small business owners, forty-five percent indicate being in home-based retail businesses, with another forty percent who still need to be categorized. Interestingly, some of the smallest categories were those typically thought of as women-dominated businesses including cosmetology and other personal care work. From respondent comments, the uncategorized forty percent "other" businesses include, but are not limited to, photography, concierge services, military pride clothing sales, and legal services.

26% of all respondents currently are or have operated their own business as a military spouse.

35% of respondents are interested in working for themselves or starting their own business.

As DoD faces budget cuts and deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan are reduced, it is widely expected that military downsizing will become a reality. With military members' transition concerns centered on loss of income and benefits, the role of their spouses to aid their transitions with dependable employment and income will become more important and should be viewed as a proactive element for the financial security of veterans post active-duty transition.

Recommendations for Spouse Employment

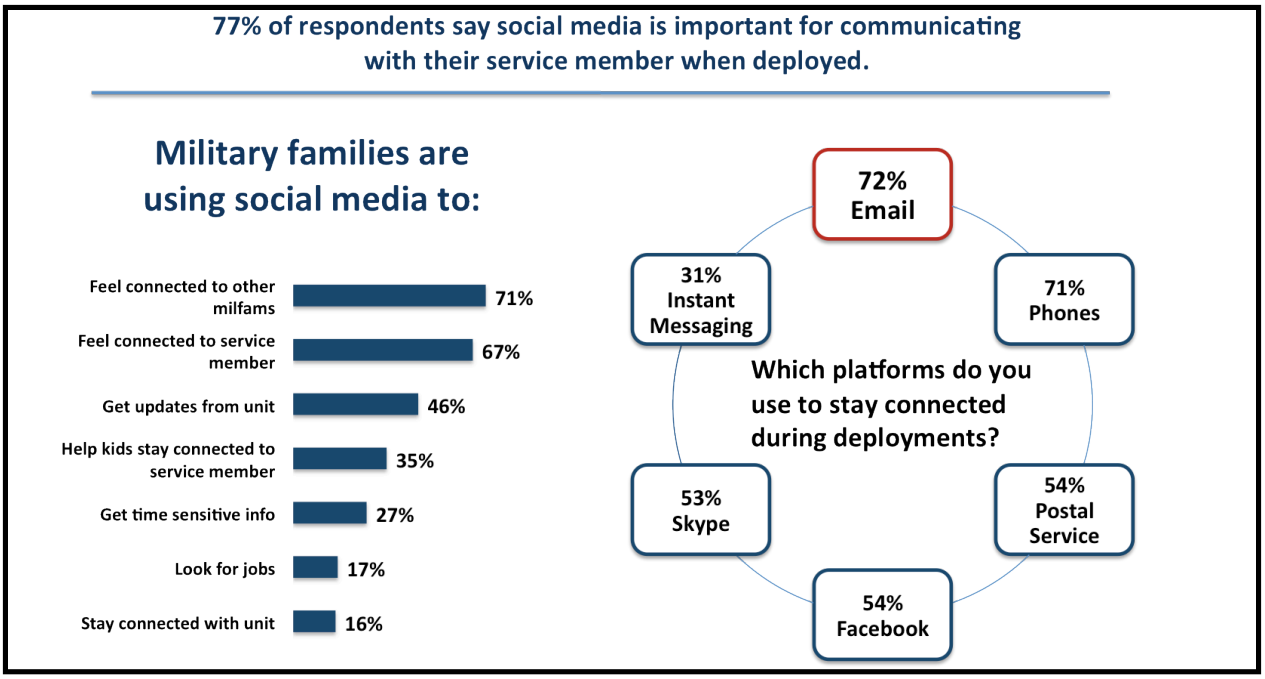
- Adjust Status of Forces Agreements (SOFA) to enable military spouses to seek local employment or adjust tax liabilities so that military spouses may work on US-based jobs while they are stationed overseas.
- Focus on supporting spouses in truly portable careers, primarily those that are performed without regard for location. As virtual work opportunities abound, these types of employers are ideal for partnering on an enterprise basis.
- Support military spouse entrepreneurs in a meaningful way, particularly through special status with government contracting and the Small Business Administration. Focusing on veteran-disabled businesses is important; however, the government typically needs small business vendors and military spouses often live where the DoD needs help.
- Support innovative programming and collaboration within and between the public, private, and non-profits sector designed to promote education and employment opportunities and resources for military spouses. For example, the National Military Family Association's Military Spouse Education Resource Guide, Blue Star Families' Making Volunteerism Work For You!, and the U.S Chamber of Commerce's *Hiring Our Heroes* employment fairs, specifically for military spouses.

MILITARY CIVILIAN INTERSECTIONS AND CONNECTEDNESS

Social Media Use & Military Family Communication

As with our society overall, social media is a large part of the communication habits of military family members. However, by comparing social media use within the civilian population to that among military families as found in this survey, it becomes clear that military family members rely on social media for personal communications with service members to a much greater extent than the general population.[57] According to the survey respondents, social media plays a large role in helping military family members connect with their service member and with other military families, as well as accessing information and resources. However, while in general it appears that military commands are beginning to use social media to communicate with the families of service members, less than forty percent of the military population is engaging with their service member's unit this way.

Social media use is prevalent throughout military families and increased from the 2010 survey, with over ninety percent of respondents reporting some type of use, as compared to less than ninety percent in 2010. Respondents' usage patterns for social media follow the same age and education trends as in the civilian population with a higher percentage of younger family members using social media more than older family members.[58] According to Experian, nearly one hundred percent of 18-34 year olds use social media, while less than eighty percent of 55-64 year olds engage in social media. The overall increase in social media use is understandable, both in terms of the general increase in the civilian population and in terms of a social support resource.



The two major uses for social media within the military family community are to feel connected to other military families and to feel connected with the service member, especially during deployment. In fact, seventy-seven percent of respondents indicated that social media is important or very important for communicating with their service member during deployment. Fifty-seven percent of respondents said

they use social media to communicate with their service member during deployment, up from fifty percent in 2010. Additionally, sixty-seven percent said they use social media to feel connected to their service member. When compared to Experian's data showing only forty-six percent of the general population use social media to communicate with friends or family, it becomes clear social media plays a much larger role in helping military families communicate, especially during deployment, than civilian families.

While social media use overall has increased, the specific media is changing. Email still remains the most popular means of communication for military families during deployment, but at seventy-two percent the reported usage is down ten points from 2010. Conversely, Facebook usage increased from forty-nine percent in 2010 to fifty-four percent in this year's survey. Skype usage jumped ten points to fifty-three percent, while instant messaging fell ten points to thirty-two percent. This represents a continued shift in the social media channels of communication for military family members during a time of war. In his thesis, David Elliott examines data indicating that Army spouses experiencing a deployment gain a certain amount of social support from Facebook, which could explain some of this increase in usage amongst military family members.[59] Interestingly, social media usage changes amongst different types of military family members, and between military family members and the general population. Military spouses use social media more to feel connected with other military families (seventy-seven percent) than to feel connected with their service member (sixty-three percent).

Email remains the most popular form of communication from a command, regardless of branch

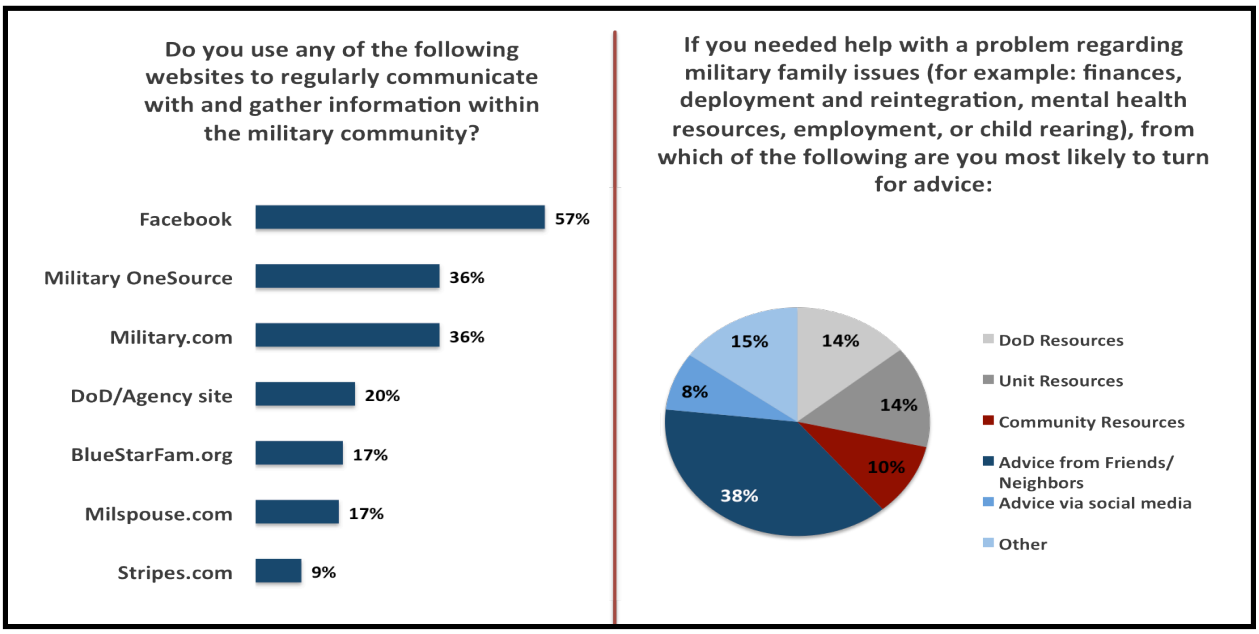
Spouses also reported the most email and phone usage during deployment, at seventy-six percent and seventy-seven percent, respectively. Comparatively, military parents and children use social media more often to feel connected with their service member than to connect with other military families, at ninety-one percent and eighty-nine percent, respectively. Military parents and children are much less likely to use social media to feel connected to other military families, at sixty-five percent and fifty-eight percent.

Within these two groups, Facebook is the most common means of communication during deployment, followed by phone for children and email for parents. Seventy-four percent of siblings of military family members use Facebook to communicate with their service member during deployment, while only sixty-nine percent use email and sixty-three percent use the phone. To add context, Experian's 2011 report indicates that only twenty-seven percent of those with siblings use social media to communicate with their siblings, while only eighteen percent of parents engage in social media to communicate with their children. Fourteen percent of adult children use social media to communicate with their parents.[60] The differences between spouse, parent and child social media engagement extend to the service member's unit, as well. Spouses are the least likely to use social media to get information about the service member's unit, at forty-six percent. Comparatively, children and parents turn to social media for news more frequently, at fifty-three percent and sixty-four percent, respectively.

Regarding command use of social media, forty-five percent of all respondents said their service members' unit uses Facebook to disseminate information, but only sixteen percent said they use social media to stay connected with the unit. Sixty-one percent of respondents said their service members' command sends information via email, while only seventeen percent listed phone or text message. While these numbers are slightly different for spouses, parents and children, they indicate a potential area for improvement in command communication, as even if family members are aware of the command's use of social media, they

are not necessarily engaging with the command in that way. It is possible that email is still the best way for key information to be communicated, especially in keeping with Operational Security (OPSEC). However, there still seems to be an audience for command information on social media, especially Facebook, which could help the non-immediate family members of service members, parents of service members in particular, feel more connected with the command.

Another aspect of online communication revealed in this year's survey is the diversification of the ways in which military families seek out information and resources. The top three resources for online information gathering were Facebook, Military OneSource, and Military.com. There seems to be no one best way to engage military families online, or, as these findings also convey, within their communities. When looking for information online, wanting to communicate with, or seeking help with a problem regarding the military, respondents were split between DoD and individual unit resources, community or online resources, and their own network of friends and family.



Social Media Recommendations

- Make briefings, training, or webinars on maintaining operational security while online available for military family members, including extended family, Family Readiness Groups (FRGs) and other family groups.
- Make briefings, trainings, or webinars on personal security and privacy online available for military family members, FRGs, and other family groups.
- Work directly with technology companies such Facebook, Twitter, and Google to ensure that, as privacy settings change, military family members are aware of how these changes may affect their personal security and privacy.
- Commands should continue to disseminate information via social media to reach parents, siblings, and extended family of service members, realizing that military family members are looking for information and resources through a variety of platforms and mediums.

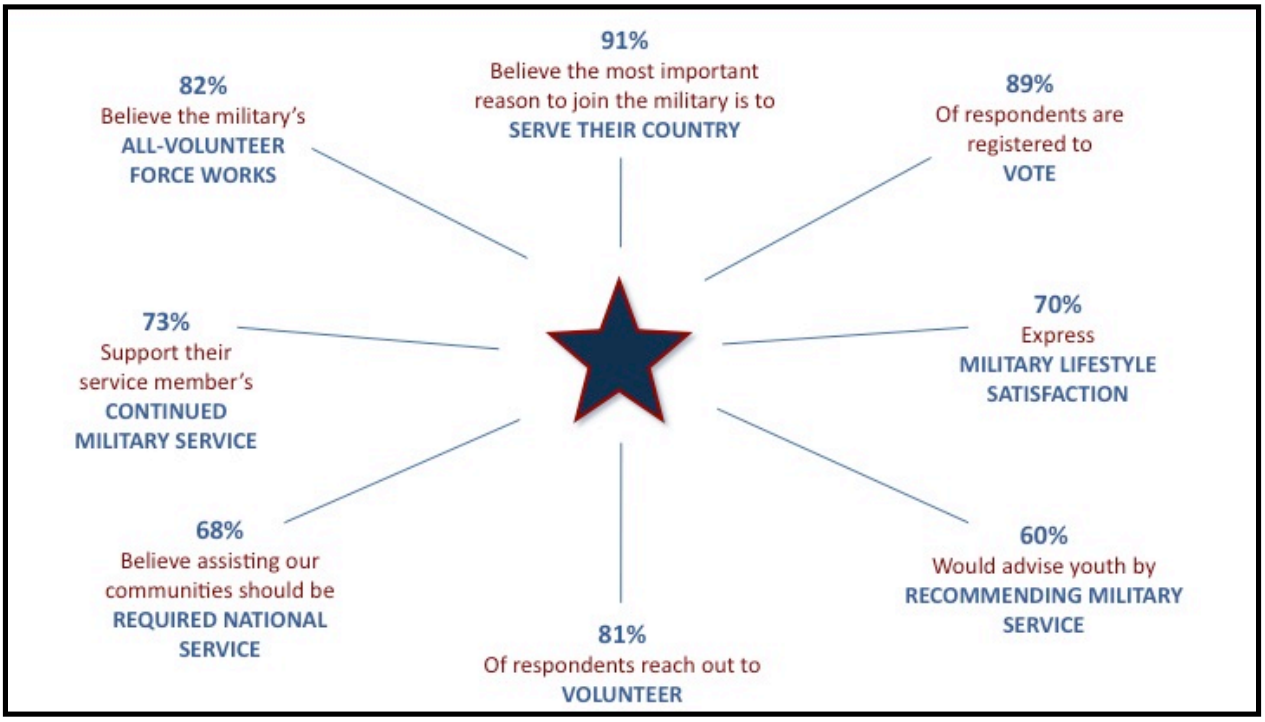
Volunteerism & Altruism

When asked the reason for joining the Armed Forces, ninety-one percent cited "To Serve His/Her Country" as the most important reason. Receiving educational benefits was listed as the next most important driver, supporting the role of a strong GI Bill as a recruitment tool moving forward and as a way to "bring bright minds into the military" thus advancing the quality of recruits serving our country.[61]

Respondents of this year's survey show similar levels of the civic engagement and volunteerism when compared with the 2010 survey, even increasing in the percentage of respondents actively volunteering in 2012. Eighty-one percent reported some form of volunteering in the last year, up thirteen points from 2010's findings. This corresponds to a slight increase in volunteering in the national population as well.[62] Additionally, new questions in this section centered on other pro-social behaviors designed to integrate the military family into their local communities. The findings indicate that military families engage in the type of social and civic behaviors that build healthy communities. For example, eighty-nine percent of respondents were registered to vote. And, in the last presidential election, eighty-two percent of respondents said they voted, almost twenty points higher than the sixty-four percent national average for the same election.[63]

Additionally, eighty-two percent of respondents believe that relying on volunteers has worked well for the armed forces and sixty-eight percent supported some type of required national service, either in the form of military or non-military service. Thirty-three percent had given money to a charity at least two or three times in the past year, while forty-one percent had offered to look after a friend's plants, pets, or home while they were away.

Measures of Civic Engagement



It is remarkable that sixty-eight percent of respondents who have volunteered for military service and believe an all volunteer force is effective also see the value of trying to impart those positive experiences to others in a mandatory national service program in military, public, or non-profit settings. Those same respondents also exhibit more pro-social behaviors such as being registered voters, volunteering regularly, and giving to charity. These results support the recent RAND initiated history of the all-volunteer force, that posits a rich combination of social, economic, and political factors influence the effectiveness of the all-volunteer force.[64] Additionally, research into the sociological concept of social capital would suggest that the complex, informal networks and relationships that are developed through the military family experience (e.g. building trust, reciprocity, informal volunteering, shared sacrifice, and cooperation between families) are the building blocks for a communitarian approach to democracy that would value service and see it as an important way to contribute to the public interest.[65]

89% of RESPONDENTS ARE CURRENTLY REGISTERED TO VOTE

WHILE 91% BELIEVE IT IS OUR OBLIGATION AS AMERICANS.

Commitment to Military Service

Military families not only understand the commitment required for military service but also largely support the obligations as they come, as represented by seventy-three percent of respondents supporting the continuation of military service by their service member. Additionally, sixty percent of respondents would recommend military service to their child or other young person. Likewise, Pew Research Center found high levels of support in post-9/11 veterans for advising a young person to join the military.[66] A deeper look at the findings requires first noting that fifty-eight percent of total respondents have had separations of thirty-six months or under since September 11, 2001.

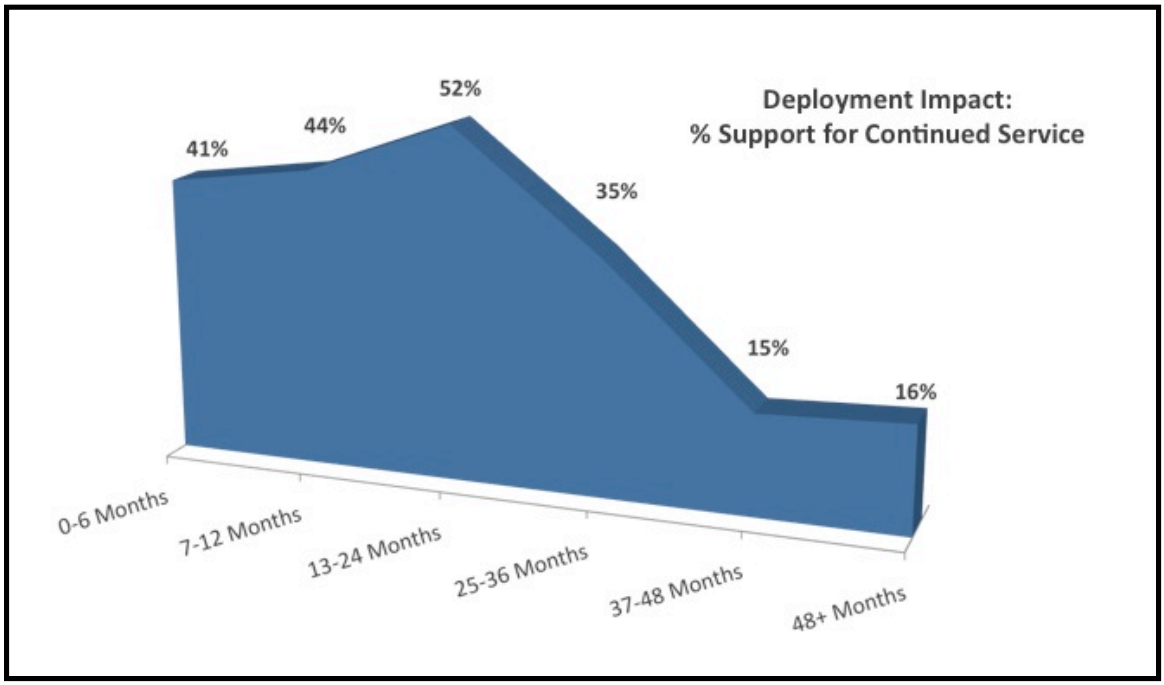
Sixty percent of respondents would recommend military service to their child or other young person

If there is a tipping point for family support, the survey data suggest it is between two to three years of deployment, backed by the following trend: support for continued military service peaks at fifty-two percent for families who have experienced thirteen to twenty-four months of deployment separation; from here, there is a seventeen-point drop for families who have experienced deployments of twenty-five to thirty-six months; and after thirty-seven months, only fifteen percent of families continue supporting military service. These findings reflect policy suggestions made by RAND Corporation to limit individual deployments to no more than twelve months in a period of thirty-six months, in order to optimize re-enlistment into the military.[67]

It should be noted that Army deployment cycles have been reduced to nine-month deployment cycles, as of January 2012 with full implementation by April 2012.[68] Prior to this point, deployment cycles for Army

soldiers were 12-15 months (as compared to nine-month deployments by Marines, six-month deployments for Navy, and three months or less for Air Force).[69]

Respondents affiliated with the Army experienced more family/service member separation than any other branch and also had the lowest percentage of respondents with satisfaction of the military lifestyle. Seventy percent of respondents for all branches were satisfied with military life, with Air Force respondents having the highest satisfaction at seventy-seven percent and Army respondents having the lowest satisfaction at sixty-eight percent.



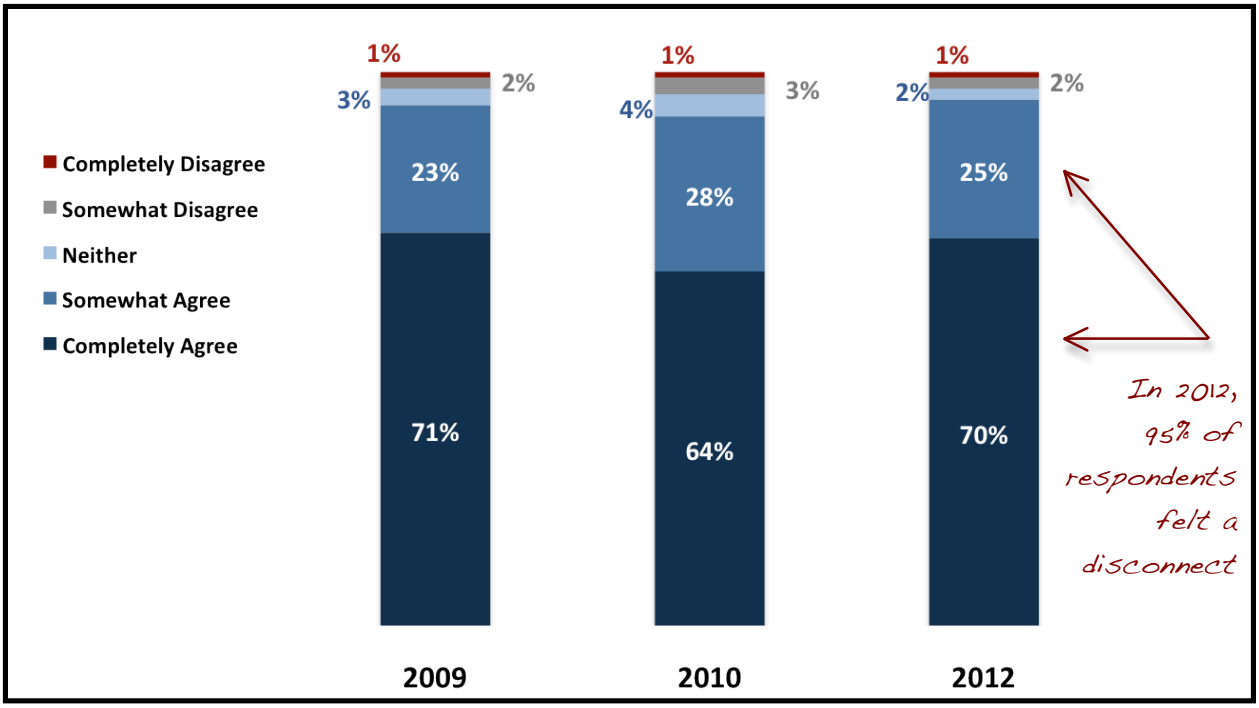
Beyond diminishing support for continued service, longer deployments may also reduce the tendency to recommend military service to young people. Respondents affiliated with the Army experienced the highest percent of time deployed past the thirty-six month mark, at twenty-one percent. They were the least likely to advise a young person to join the military as well as most likely to advise against service when compared to other branches. Isolating the Army experience may foreshadow the larger impact of long campaigns on military sustainability, not only in support to continue service but also on recommendations for future generations to serve.

Joining Forces to Bridge the Civilian-Military Disconnect

While the contributing factors may vary, this survey contains strong indications that the military community keenly believes the general population does not truly understand or appreciate sacrifices made by military families. Other research on veterans, conducted by Pew Research Center, has found a comparable level of disconnect, with eighty-four percent of modern-era veterans saying that the general public does not have an understanding of the problems that those in the military face.[70] With ninety-five percent of respondents in

agreement in this survey, the reason for this disconnect is not easy to pin down, but it is consistent with previous findings from 2009 (ninety-two percent) and 2010 (ninety-four percent).

To what extent do you agree with the statement:
"The general public (without close ties to the military) does not truly understand or appreciate the sacrifices made by service members and their families."



Previous research has suggested the lack of affiliation of someone to a military member may be one of the key causes of this disconnect, with a smaller share of Americans serving in the military since the peace time era between WWI and WWII.[71] As the size of the military shrinks in the coming months, the connection between military and the broader population may grow more distant. Former Defense Secretary Gates agreed with this family member correlation, stating that a smaller military means fewer Americans will have relatives serving and this number will continue to diminish. He also stated any lack of military awareness may be driven by the fact that young people today do not have to face the possibility of a draft.[72] Retired Admiral Mike Mullen, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has suggested the retreat of the military from the civilian awareness can be associated with Base Realignment and Closures (BRAC), saying that we have "BRAC'ed our way out of significant portions of the country."[73]

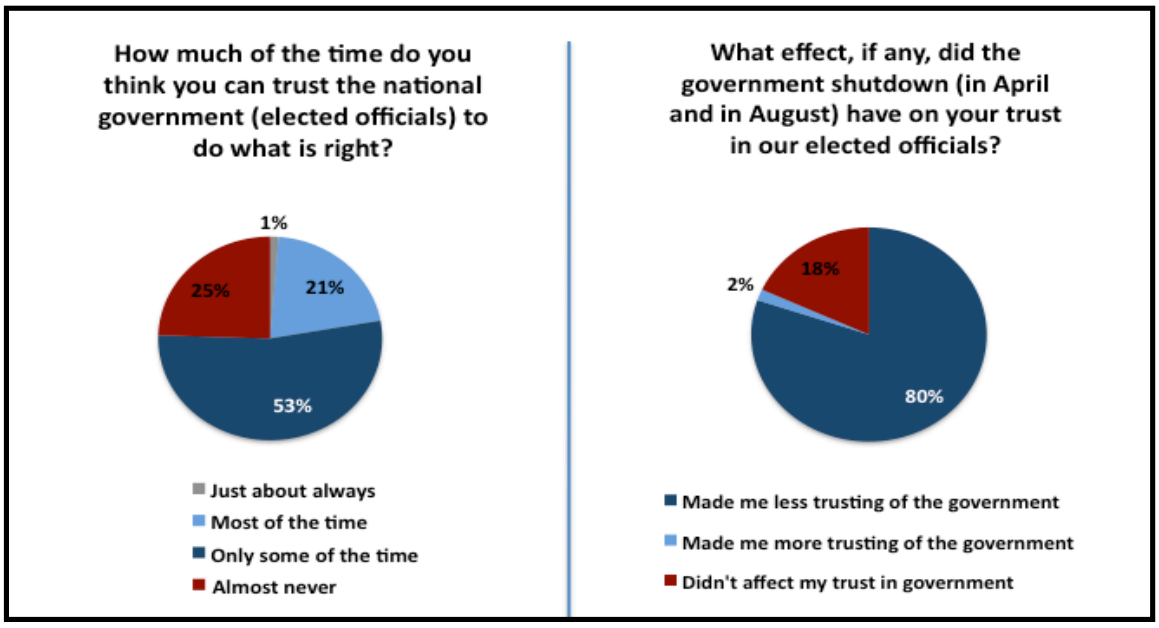
First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden have paid substantial attention to the issue of awareness of the military within civilian communities. Under their leadership, the *Joining Forces* movement has focused on sacrifices made by the military community and the unique challenges faced by families. Because of *Joining Forces*, awareness is being raised and public and private sector initiatives are gaining momentum. The most recent example of progress made is the establishment of best practices for states to follow so that military spouses can more easily manage occupational certifications across state lines.[74]

However, *Joining Forces* has been in existence for just one year and most military families still have not heard about it. Seventy-two percent of survey respondents were unaware of its goals to mobilize all sectors of society and raise awareness of the unique needs and strengths of military families. Most of those who have participated in a *Joining Forces* event to date have done so because they were involved with a partnering organization, which highlights the importance of support organizations as vehicles for information transference within the military community.

PUBLIC POLICY

Trust in Government and Foreign Policy

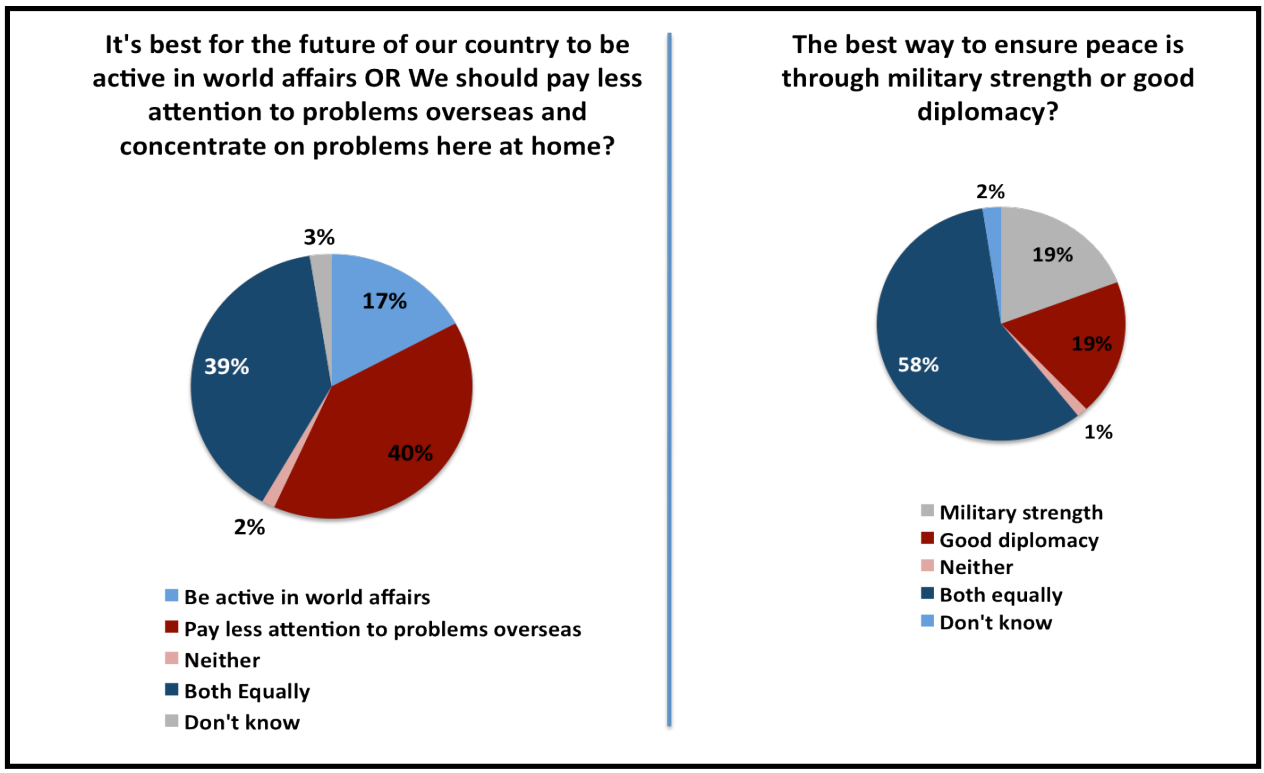
Military families have similar levels of trust in government as the general population.[75] Just twenty-two percent of survey respondents say they trust the government in Washington to do what is right just about always or most of the time; whereas, seventy-eight percent say they can trust the government to do what is right only some of the time or almost never. When asked about the effect of the government shutdown (in April and August 2011) on their trust in our elected officials, eighty percent of respondents said it made them less trusting of the government and eighteen percent said it did not affect their trust in government.



The potential impact of military families' declining trust in government matters because if they do not trust government to do what is right and have increasingly negative perceptions of government, then they are less likely to pursue careers in public service or hold elected office after their military service ends. Having veterans in positions of leadership in public service and public office matters because their military service experience informs their preferences and outlook on the development, implementation, and evaluation of public policies. Donald Zillman, who studies veterans in Congress, has highlighted the significance of veterans serving in high government positions in his research: "military veterans bring unique assets to the Congress including a familiarity with high or ground level military policy, a prior exposure to national

service, an appreciation of the distinctive characteristics of military service, and the moral authority of having 'been there themselves' when sending young men and women into combat for national objectives".[76,77] Zillman suggests that the declining number of veterans in positions of leadership at the federal level has the potential to influence the structure of the armed forces and civilian-military relations. One way to both build trust in government and help diminish the larger civil-military divide is to engage veterans in continued public service after their military career ends. While the suggestions for action may well take time to implement, familiarizing non-veteran government officials with the military and the military family lifestyle can have a direct impact on upholding healthy civilian-military relations.

After a decade of war in Iraq and Afghanistan and concerns about another great recession, it is not surprising to see forty percent of respondents took an isolationist stance on U.S. foreign policy, agreeing our country should pay less attention to problems overseas and concentrate more on problems at home. In contrast to recent Pew research in which thirty–three percent of Americans say it is best for the future of our country to be active in world affairs, only seventeen percent of survey respondents took this internationalist stance.[78] While these views on the role of the U.S. in the world are substantially different than the general population, it does highlight that military families understand the important role of our country and the armed forces in global affairs and at home.



Survey respondents were evenly split (at nineteen percent) between military strength or good diplomacy as the best way to ensure peace, which emulates to a lesser extent the Pew Research Center's 2007 survey in which Americans were also closely divided on this view forty-nine percent vs. forty-seven percent. Fifty-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. Military families are acutely aware of the wide-ranging and adapting role of the armed services in our national security and in global affairs.

Recommendations To Decrease Civil-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.
- Identify qualified veterans and spouses for appointments and task forces.
- Encourage veterans and spouses to run for elected office by recruiting and supporting veteran and military spouse candidates, executive branch appointees, and judicial nominees.
- Utilize resources like the House and Senate Military Family Caucuses to host symposiums, forums, and meetings where military families can provide feedback and input to national leadership.
- Utilize 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.

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 2011. A large majority of respondents reported the repeal has had no impact on their service member's ability to perform their job. Sixty-five percent report the repeal has had no impact on a variety of job and morale related areas. Seventy-two percent of respondents said the repeal had no impact on their service member's ability to do their job, sixty-five percent said it had no impact on their service member's desire to re-enlist or stay in the military, and sixty-percent reported no impact on their service member's morale. Additionally, ten percent of respondents reported a positive impact on their service member's morale and mission readiness, and on the respondent's own interest in attending military social functions.

A majority of respondents said that the repeal of Don't Ask Don't Tell has had no impact on a variety of morale and readiness issues

These early perceptions of military families on the repeal of DADT support 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."[79] 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.[80,81] In this survey, there were minimal differences in impact of the repeal among branch of service, at less than two percent. And, while this survey was administered within thirty days of the repeal of DADT, perhaps limiting some of its ability to accurately measure the full effects of the repeal of DADT, many of the questions centered on perceptions that could be immediately gauged by the

respondent. So, while there are still a lot of unknowns with regard to this policy change, this survey is able to provide some insight into this evolving issue.

Energy Policy

Overwhelmingly, respondents support reducing DoD energy consumption and developing new energy policies to reduce our country's dependence on foreign energy sources. Eighty percent of respondents believe it is important to support DoD's usage of more sources of alternative energy (sun, wind, solar, and geothermal). Eighty percent of respondents believe it is important to support DoD policies and program development to address reduction in energy and fuel consumption. Eighty-two percent of respondents believe it is important to support the development of more sources of alternative energy (sun, wind, solar, and geothermal). Eighty percent of respondents believe it is important to provide more incentives for conservation of natural resources and seventy-nine percent of respondents believe it is important to support tapping into domestic sources of energy. Eighty-six percent of respondents believe it is important to support national energy policies and program development that make the United States more self-sufficient.

Not only do our military and civilian leadership acknowledge the critical link between national security and energy policies; but military families also recognize the strategic role of energy in our nation's security. Energy security encompasses a range of domestic and foreign policy areas, "from the domestic imperative of the protection of critical energy infrastructure, to the integrity of global energy supply chains, to the use of scarce resources for exacting political and economic leverage by producer countries over consuming ones."[82]

CONCLUSION

After a decade of war, military families are generally coping well with the unique stressors of military family life. However, as indicated by the results detailed here, community and government leaders can do more to help make military life more sustainable.

While military families have the same life experiences common to many families, including balancing work and family, parenting issues such as care-giving and education concerns, and maintaining healthy relationships, they also have unique stressors relating to the requirements of the military lifestyle. Many factors of military family life (namely, frequent separation and the subsequent pre-deployment and reintegration processes, and the issues surrounding frequent relocation) produce added pressures that need to be examined and addressed in order to maintain health and wellness within both the military and family contexts.

Today's military families are accommodating repeated and sustained deployments with all of their varied, accompanying effects. Since September 11, 2001, more than two million service members have been deployed, with a large percentage of those serving multiple deployments, some as many as five tours of duty.[83] In this survey, National Guard and Reserve service members had been separated from their families for almost the same amount of time as active duty service members, revealing their integral role in augmenting the active duty force, as well as highlighting the departure from their traditional roles. Service members themselves are surviving injuries, head trauma, and other catastrophic injuries their predecessors

did not because of the vast improvements in medical technology. However, these injuries, both physical and non-physical, have an impact on the family unit and are additional and substantial stressors upon a small segment of the population as well as the agencies and community organizations designed to support them.

However, there is also good news in perceived benefits of affiliation to the military. Recent research has shown despite the added stress placed on military families from repeated separations and OPTEMPO requirements, military divorce rates are the same or lower than civilian rates across age, race, and employment status.[84] While the authors of the study indicate several possibilities for these results, ranging from competitive wartime pay, family support programs, and respect towards institutions in general, the resilience of military marriages, after ten years of war, is definitely a positive finding. And, while they acknowledge challenges associated with military service, military families in this study generally feel like the all-volunteer force has worked well, support the continued service of their own service member, and would recommend military service to their children, bolstering previous research which found the same.[85] These results also point to the strong pro-social tendencies and civic assets that reside within the military community. Respondents in this survey volunteered at incredible rates; both informal and formal volunteering, voting behavior, and charitable and altruistic activities all had high levels of respondent participation. Impressively, ten percent of respondents volunteer time that is the equivalent of a part-time job. Perhaps emphasis on service and volunteerism is one way to bridge the disconnect between the military and civilian populations with regard to the experiences of modern day military families. Military families know they must rely on one another in order to benefit the whole of their community and have learned that service to others can, in fact, be a healing gesture for themselves.

We hope this report prompts more dialogue about the unique experiences of military families, and not just their challenges, but what they bring to their communities as civic assets. Our military community is vibrant, resilient, and stands ready to meet the impact of shifting national security requirements. However, in order to be successful, policies must adapt to the changing needs of our military force and strengthen the support environment around them.

For more information, to volunteer, or contribute to enable *Blue Star Families* to continue this critical work, please visit www.bluestarfam.org.

About The Authors

Vivian W. Greentree, Ph.D., is Blue Star Families' Director of Research and Policy and a co-founder of the organization. A Navy veteran and military spouse, Vivian's areas of public policy research include civic engagement, public service motivation, and military family community policy. She was recently named a Daily Point of Light by the Points of Light Institute for her volunteer work and has appeared as an expert on panels, conferences, and symposiums around the country. Vivian has led Blue Star Families' survey for the last two years.

Leah Dagher is a small business owner who specializes in organizational change consulting and leadership coaching. She has 18 years professional experience in the federal government and the private sector; her clients include senior military officers and command chiefs as well as corporate leaders. Leah is currently working with her clients and studying Arabic in Washington, DC in anticipation of working in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia for the following two years. Leah has been an Air Force spouse for four years.

Shana Johnson is an urban planner specializing in transportation and economic development. The spouse and daughter of military veterans, she received the 1999 Woodrow Wilson Award for Exemplary Volunteer Service, the highest national award for an American Red Cross youth volunteer, and from 1999 to 2003 she represented military youth volunteers on the Red Cross National Youth Council. She holds a Masters of Urban and Regional Planning degree from Virginia Tech and a B.A. with High Honors in Geography and International Development from Clark University.

Kitsa Lee is an experienced market research professional specializing in quantitative and qualitative media research. She began her research career at Arbitron Inc. where she worked directly with radio stations and agencies to assist them in understanding Arbitron's survey methodology and procedures, as well as provide consultative data analysis and insights. Currently, she is Sales/Marketing Manager at Harvest Associates, LLC and volunteers as a research assistant for Blue Star Families. She received her Bachelor of Science degree in Business Management from University of Maryland, University College.

Kathleen Levingston, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in the Counseling and Human Services department at Old Dominion University. She is the faculty advisor for the new Student Veterans Association and a facilitator for the ODU Military Alliance. She is also a member of TEAMS (Teaching, Education and Awareness for Military Students), an interdisciplinary initiative that is focused on building military conscious schools where every military child is educated by individuals who are well prepared to effectively respond to the unique learning and social-emotional needs of military-connected children.

Cammy Elquist LoRe' is an Army spouse who telecommutes as a functional leader for communications and customer programs for M3 Planning, a strategic planning consultancy. Her professional background includes 15 years of corporate communication assessments, public relations and cross-cultural brand management. She has been a military spouse since 2002 and met her husband at the University of Nevada, Reno in 1991. They have a four-year-old son Sendoa John LoRe' who is an aspiring super-fast, super-strong super hero. She holds a Master's certificate in Organizational Leadership and a Dual Bachelors of Arts degree in Journalism & Anthropology.

Jennifer A. Taylor is an Assistant Professor of Public Administration and Public Policy at James Madison University. She teaches coursework in the nonprofit concentration of the MPA program and the graduate certificate in International Non-Governmental Organizations. Her research has been presented at over fifteen academic conferences and has appeared in *Voluntas* and *Administrative Theory and Praxis.* She, her military husband, Asa, and their three children, Amelia, Wyatt, and Stella, reside in Harrisonburg, Virginia, where they enjoy hiking, winter sports, scouting, and going to airshows.

AnnaMaria White possesses more than a decade of experience in marketing and public relations and has worked in a wide range of areas from the public sector including political campaigns and government, to the private sector with a focus on entertainment and consumer products. Ms. White is the public relations manager for Blue Star Families and the principal of White Star Communications, a boutique communications firm specializing in public relations, marketing and events. Ms. White is a Marine Corps spouse and has been a member of Blue Star Families since 2008.

Comments may be directed to the Blue Star Families Research Team:
Vivian W. Greentree, Ph.D.
vgreentree@bluestarfam.org

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