

COVID-19

MILITARY SUPPORT INITIATIVE

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Pain Points Poll Qualitative Report: HEALTH, WELLNESS, AND CAREGIVING

“IF THERE ARE SPECIFIC BARRIERS THAT ARE PREVENTING YOU AND YOUR HOUSEHOLD FROM EFFECTIVELY SUPPORTING YOUR PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH THROUGH THIS CRISIS, PLEASE TELL US MORE ABOUT THEM.”

Question fielded April 15 - May 5, 2020 || All respondents, regardless of military affiliation, received this question; however, 69% of respondents were military spouses.

Over one-third of respondents indicated their health care appointments had been canceled or were hard to obtain as a result of the crisis. These appointments ranged from routine wellness and specialist appointments, such as annual physicals, dental and eye appointments, to elective procedures. The second-largest portion of respondents reported experiencing mental health challenges, including an inability to see their family’s regular mental health care providers or start new mental health services.

In addition to barriers to health care services, 12% of respondents expressed that fear of exposure to the virus prevented them from supporting their own physical and mental health. Finding the time and/or space to exercise given facility closures (10%) and finding time for general self-care (9%) were frequently cited barriers among respondents.

“Eye doctor and orthodontic care is on hold, and my soldier husband cannot finalize his overseas screening and paperwork for the PCS we expect to eventually make. The rest of the family has completed the screening and all shots required for our move, but his was supposed to be within 60 days of the PCS, and now the part of the clinic that handles that for soldiers is not being allowed to do their job.”

- Military Spouse

“We just had a second baby. Due to the stop movement [order], we were unable to have family or friends in to help. My service member still only got two weeks of leave and is working longer hours because his boss says ‘Marines die in war’ [and] is continuing life as usual. He is a senior staff NCO and cannot make changes needed to protect his guys or his family. It’s been stressful for all of us.”

- Marine Corps Spouse

“Shelter in place restrictions have restricted most of the outlets I used prior to COVID to manage my PTSD/depression and, as a result, I have increased anxiety, which has required taking PRN anxiety meds much more frequently.” - Veteran

“I am very lucky to have access to telehealth services, as well as a pretty good support network of friends and family online. But in some ways, in-person contact just cannot be substituted.”

- Military Spouse

TOP CODES		
PERCENT	COUNT	CODE
37%	64	Health care appointments cancelled/hard to obtain
26%	44	Mental health challenges
12%	21	Concern for exposure
10%	18	Difficulty exercising/gym closures
9%	16	Shift to telehealth services
9%	15	Difficulty finding time for self-care
7%	12	Difficulty accessing prescription medications
	Total: 172	

“PLEASE TELL US MORE ABOUT HOW YOUR SCHOOL-AGED CHILD(REN) ARE CURRENTLY COPING WITH THIS CRISIS (INCLUDING STORIES OF RESILIENCE AND DIFFICULTY).”

“Our children are making the most of the situation. They frequently express sadness about missing their friends and are worried they won’t get to say goodbye before we PCS.” - Military Spouse

“My son already struggles with anxiety. Daddy being deployed made this harder to handle. Now, not knowing when daddy is coming home, my son is really struggling. His routines and schedules have been changed, very little social interaction, etc. This has made bed times difficult with lots of tears and even wanting to sleep in my bed. [There has been] some acting out because of the frustrations and lack of certainty.” - National Guard Spouse

Question fielded April 15 - May 5, 2020 || All respondents with school-aged children received this question, regardless of military affiliation; however, 73% of respondents were military spouses.

Thirty-four percent of respondents cited that feeling isolated as a result of school closures was how their children were handling the pandemic. Respondents also said their children were having difficulty adjusting (21%), acting more emotional than usual (20%), and experiencing anxiety (10%).

On the other hand, 31% of respondents reported their child(ren) are doing okay during the crisis and describe silver linings, such as becoming more involved in their child(ren)’s education. Also, 8% indicated that having more time at home has strengthened relationships among siblings.

While my kids miss their friends and are frustrated with the online learning, we have become closer as a family. We’re able to have family game night almost every night and regularly take walks together. Normally, we’re all split up and attending our own activities separately. My kids have found they have more things in common with each other than they knew.” - Military Spouse

TOP CODES

PERCENT	COUNT	CODE
34%	85	Child(ren) becoming isolated/missing friends
31%	78	Child(ren) are doing okay
21%	53	Child(ren) are having difficulty adjusting
20%	50	Child(ren) are emotional
12%	31	Activities have been canceled
10%	25	Child(ren) experiencing anxiety
8%	19	Developing closer relationships with siblings/family
8%	20	Unable to meet special needs
	Total: 252	

“PLEASE TELL US MORE ABOUT HOW THE CURRENT CRISIS HAS AFFECTED YOU AS A CAREGIVER.”

“I’m exhausted and can’t get a break... it’s depressing and just so hard some days.” - Spouse of a Veteran

“I care for my parents and disabled brother. I am not able to touch them and have to ensure their safety while still doing things to help them. This has been very hard. My disabled brother does not have access to his usual community care options because of COVID-19 and this is very stressful for him and my parents, whom he lives with. My parents’ mental health and physical health is deteriorating because they do not have respite with my disabled brother, and to keep them safe, I have had to change some of the caregiving activities I do.”

- Civilian Defense Community Member

Question fielded April 15 - May 5, 2020 || All caregiver respondents received this question, regardless of military affiliation; however, 57% of respondents were military spouses.

The inability to use respite care (and therefore make time for self-care) was the most commonly-cited impact respondents reported; 31% said this was the case. One-fifth of respondents reported the care recipient has been unable to access support services during the crisis, adding additional responsibilities to the caregiver’s plate. Fourteen percent of respondents reported using telehealth services, but most of these individuals acknowledged that telehealth service quality was not the same as in-person support for the care recipient.

“Very depressing and difficult to be home with a special needs child while dealing with immune-compromised health issues myself [and] while my husband has to continue to report to an area that’s considered a hotspot for COVID.” - Military Spouse

TOP CODES		
PERCENT	COUNT	CODE
31%	40	No respite/self-care
19%	25	Unable to receive support services
14%	18	Using telehealth services
12%	16	Care recipient unable to access appointment
12%	16	Mental health challenges
9%	11	Concern for exposure
9%	11	Worried
	Total: 129	

RESPONSES TO THE “OTHER” WRITE-IN ANSWERS TO INQUIRING ABOUT THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE RESPONDENT’S HEALTH AND WELLNESS.

“A member of my house provides frontline care for COVID-19 positive [patients] and I have been subject to quarantine purely because of my family member providing care for positive [patients]. Even with all proper PPE in place at their job.” - Air Force Spouse

“Maintenance health care such as chiropractic and dental has to be cancelled unless emergent. My daughter and I are dealing with an interrupted wellness cycle that was maintaining us through our fibromyalgia.” - DOD Civilian

Question fielded March 18 - April 14, 2020 || All respondents received this question, regardless of military affiliation; however, 54% of respondents were military spouses.

“Concern about exposure to the virus” was the most commonly-cited write-in response (40%) during the first four weeks of polling. Many of those respondents who expressed concern about exposure also mentioned that they were essential workers or lived with an essential worker. One-quarter of respondents reported challenges with health care appointment cancellations and/or an inability to schedule new appointments.

“My spouse’s anxiety is high. She does not currently see a mental health provider and it will be a while before she can make an appointment.”

- Air Force Reserve Service Member

TOP CODES		
PERCENT	COUNT	CODE
40%	47	Concern for exposure
24%	28	Health care appointments cancelled/hard to obtain
12%	14	Mental health challenges
9%	11	No impact
8%	10	Household supplies difficult to find
	Total: 119	

This report was prepared by Carrie Carter (Applied Research Generalist - Consultant, Blue Star Families) with support from Kim Hunt, Ph.D. (Applied Research Analyst - Consultant, Blue Star Families), Jennifer Akin, MPA (Senior Evaluation Manager, Blue Star Families), and Jessica Strong, Ph.D. (Senior Research Manager, Blue Star Families).