

COVID-19

MILITARY SUPPORT INITIATIVE

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Pain Points Poll Qualitative Report: PERSONNEL & READINESS

General Personnel & Readiness

PLEASE TELL US MORE ABOUT HOW YOUR/YOUR SERVICE MEMBER'S UNIT IS HANDLING THIS CRISIS, INCLUDING WHAT IS GOING WELL.

Question fielded April 15 - May 26, 2020 || All respondents who indicated they were themselves a currently-serving service member or were married to one received this question; however, 78% of those who responded were military spouses.

Respondents' perceptions of their/their service member's unit operations during the crisis were widely varied, reflecting differences in perceptions of how well installations and units implemented safety precautions. Nearly one-third of respondents indicated that their/their

service member's unit was teleworking during the crisis, including examples such as remote drill and virtual physical training (PT) sessions. While many respondents described benefits of teleworking, such as more family time, increased flexibility, and the opportunity for personal/professional development, others reported significant technological challenges that prevented the service member from being as effective at their role from home. Only 25% of respondents mentioned their/their service member's unit was taking precautions; the most common precaution discussed was splitting teams to reduce exposure (14%).

Thirteen percent of respondents expressed appreciation for the support from their command team and unit, and 8% highlighted strong communication from units and installations. Among the 7% percent of respondents who reported they/their service member was continuing to work as normal, the level of precaution taken within units was inconsistent across responses.

“The [Commanding General (CG)] is doing regular town hall meetings online. At first, they were very bad. You could see the CG and other leaders not following their own guidance (sitting right next to each other, passing a microphone back and forth between the 3 of them, fist bumping...) as they are telling people ‘no hand shakes; maintain 6 ft apart,’ etc. The town halls are better now. Our post was not testing, but a week ago, they began doing more regular tests for people.” - Military Spouse and Veteran

“They have them all home which is the best thing about all of this, not to be insensitive to anyone who has died as a result. But we never have my husband home and it’s been nice to still have job security, schools offer[ing] food, and on-base housing.”

- Military Spouse

“We are using the slower operational tempo to develop internal training and skills prioritized by our Major Command (Pacific Air Forces) to make our Airmen more deployable and versatile in response to future threats. ”

- Air Force Service Member

“It was a rough transition to teleworking for some members - the military is not set up for telework - accesses are limited/restricted, commercial programs are not allowed. Military computers and devices don’t allow many of the software options required for telework team work.”

- Activated Air National Guard Service Member

TOP CODES		
PERCENT	COUNT	CODE
31%	163	Teleworking
25%	134	Taking precautions
14%	74	Split teams (isolating groups of personnel from other groups)
13%	67	Supportive command team
9%	47	Not following CDC guidelines
8%	44	Good communication
8%	43	Following CDC guidelines
8%	42	Deployed
7%	39	Continue as normal
	Total: 534	

IF YOU HAVE HAD A COVID-RELATED CONCERN THAT YOU OR A FAMILY MEMBER HAS RAISED WITH MILITARY LEADERSHIP, PLEASE TELL US ABOUT HOW IT WAS HANDLED AND WHETHER IT CAME TO A SATISFACTORY RESOLUTION.

“Concerns were generally acknowledged but not addressed because the unit is responsible for training. They do the best they can...but still work in close quarters.” - Army Spouse

Question fielded May 20 - 26, 2020 || The response rate to this question was too low to code; however, sample responses are included below for context.

“I asked my husband who is a mechanic if they are sanitizing the tools they all share. He hadn’t thought about that but immediately implemented the last hour of each shift to proper sanitation.”

- Marine Corps Spouse

“Masks not being worn is concerning when the guidance is we should be wearing them. I seem to be the only one wearing it along with the Marines at the entrance gates.” - Active-Duty Service Member & Spouse

“I raised the concern to my supervisor [...] that we are still too close at work and we have no cleaning products and I was told that I was paranoid and nothing was done.”

- Navy Service Member

Transitioning Service Members

PLEASE TELL US MORE ABOUT HOW THIS CRISIS IS IMPACTING YOUR/YOUR FAMILY’S TRANSITION OUT OF MILITARY SERVICE.

Question fielded April 15 - May 26, 2020 || All respondents who reported they are themselves a service member or are married to one, and that indicated their transition out of service has been impacted, received this question; however, 82% of respondents were military spouses.

Although only a small number of respondents chose to answer this open-ended question (n=39), the findings echo quantitative data from the Pain Points Poll. Twenty-eight percent of respondents indicated they were unable to complete transition processing, such as DEERS appointments and medical evaluations. Another 28% reported their transition was on hold due to delays for the service member’s replacement or the service member’s

essential status. Many respondents expressed anxiety and sadness about transitioning; for example, several expressed disappointment about being unable to hold retirement ceremonies for their spouses with over 20 years of service. Over one-fifth of respondents indicated they were unsure about the impact the pandemic would have on their transition.

“We RETIRE next month. My husband got a great job in Texas but we couldn’t go to the state to house hunt as the governor blocked entry to the state. Now the state is open, the market has heated up. We made two trips and have lost house after house. We live [in] base housing and need to move out. Or we think we have to. This has caused much stress and anxiety for my family. Thankful to [the] Hilton points program that has offset the cost of the hotel. Eating out, gas is our only expense as of now. So grateful, but we have to come back. 1st world problems I know, but it has been a stress. Retirement ceremony and celebration was cancelled. After 27 years of faithful service. It’s sad.” - Military Spouse

Respondents also reported the pandemic impacted their family’s preparation for civilian reintegration. Eighteen percent of respondents reported transitioning career paths during the pandemic, 5/7 of whom were military spouses. The inability to seek employment (15%) and housing (10%) due to unclear transition timelines were commonly-reported challenges.

“My husband was planning to retire, however, with the COVID crisis, we were nervous he would be unable to find a job after the military, therefore we would not be able to live the lifestyle we were used to. So...he is no longer retiring and we PCS in July.”

- Air Force Spouse

“Just [a] tough time to be switching careers and finding a job. Lots of resumes are being sent out but there is very little response. It is tough not to become depressed as months go by. Transitioning is not easy. It is really not easy right now! I do my best to support but I am becoming more worried and anxious!”

- Marine Corps Spouse

TOP CODES		
PERCENT	COUNT	CODE
28%	11	Unable to complete processing
28%	11	Transition on hold
23%	9	Unsure of impact
18%	7	Transitioning career paths
15%	6	Unable to search for employment
10%	4	Unable to search for housing
10%	4	Considering staying in
	Total: 39	

SELECTED RESPONSES TO THE “OTHER” WRITE-IN ANSWER CHOICE INQUIRING ABOUT THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE RESPONDENT’S TRANSITION.

“Not sure yet, but may likely see delay to anticipated transition out and disrupted ETS. Hard to plan at this time.” - Army Spouse

“Mandatory retirement date is approaching , others have ETS’s etc... DoD transition ~17K every month... disruptions of many services that would support this.... zero information about how this will now actually occur if at all! - Army Service Member

“Involuntary EAS this summer due to husband not being selected for next rank as an officer. He is trying to submit an exception to policy so we can stay here longer than the first week in July but with the USMC’s guidance [...] we could stay but would still be required to leave Okinawa no later than September (fiscal year). Our family is in quite a stressful situation. The whole world says [no] to [international] travel yet the USMC says you have to. Knowing we will have to secure jobs and housing while trying to keep our two daughters protected from the stress of a move during a pandemic-yikes!”

- Marine Corps Spouse

TOP CODES		
PERCENT	COUNT	CODE
16%	6	Unsure of impact
11%	4	Unable to complete processing
8%	3	Not impacted
8%	3	Transition on hold
	Total: 38	

This report was prepared by Carrie Carter (Applied Research Generalist - Consultant, Blue Star Families) with support from Jennifer Akin, MPA (Co-Director of Applied Research, Blue Star Families).