Blue Star Families' annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey provides a comprehensive understanding of what it means to serve as a military family. For that reason, it is a blueprint for strengthening America and identifying how we can continue to enhance military family life.

**Top 5 issues affecting military families**¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active-Duty Families</th>
<th>Reserve Families</th>
<th>National Guard Families</th>
<th>Veteran Families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Military spouse employment</td>
<td>Amount of time away from family</td>
<td>Amount of time away from family</td>
<td>Access to military/VA health care systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of time away from family</td>
<td>Impact of deployment on family</td>
<td>Impact of deployment on family</td>
<td>Civilian understanding of military/Veteran issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependent child(ren)'s education</td>
<td>Military spouse employment</td>
<td>Military pay</td>
<td>Veteran employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relocation/PCS issues</td>
<td>Military benefits</td>
<td>Military benefits</td>
<td>Service member/Veteran/family member mental health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military pay</td>
<td>Civilian understanding of military/Veteran issues</td>
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<td>Military benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24%</td>
<td>23%</td>
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<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Spouse Employment²**

- Employed (in labor force): 80%
- Unemployed (in labor force and actively seeking work)*: 20%
- Not in labor force: 42%

*National unemployment rate was 6% in May 2021³

63% of employed military spouses are underemployed in some way⁴

47% of employed active-duty spouse respondents report they would be looking for a new job in the next 12 months

**Family Separation**

- 8 in 10 active-duty family respondents have been separated from their family/service member in the past 18 months due to military service
- 31% have been separated for a total of six or more months
- 4% are currently geobaching⁵

**TAKEAWAYS**

Too few military families feel a sense of belonging to their communities

- Military spouses face unemployment rates that are 4x the national average
- Military families continue to experience frequent separations from their service member

**Active-duty family members and their civilian communities**

- 30% of active-duty family respondents feel a sense of belonging to their local civilian community
- Active-duty family respondents agree civilians in their local community:
  - Are supportive of local military and Veteran families: 50%
  - Truly appreciate the sacrifices made by local military and Veteran families: 33%
  - Truly understand the sacrifices made by local military and Veteran families: 19%

8,004 respondents

Including active-duty, National Guard and Reserve service members, Veterans, and their family members

In collaboration with

Syracuse University
D’Antoniello Institute for Veterans & Military Families

1Question and answer choice wording changed slightly from previous MFLS surveys
2Active-duty spouse respondents who are not also active-duty service members
4Indicates one or more circumstances of underemployment
5Choosing to live apart voluntarily, not including times of deployment
**Snapshot of the military lifestyle**

Service member respondents report **experiencing racial discrimination** in their military community.

- **47%** Service member of color
- **25%** White service member part of multi-racial/multi-ethnic family
- **15%** White service member not part of a multi-racial/multi-ethnic family
- **41%** of active-duty family respondents feel there is less racial discrimination in the military, compared to the general U.S. society

**Financial Readiness**

- **Top Contributors to Financial Stress**
  - 41% Spouse un/under-employment
  - 30% Student loans
  - 29% Out-of-pocket relocation costs

- **55%** of active-duty family respondents with student loan debt owe more than $25,000

**Health and Mental Health**

- **41%** of active-duty family respondents rate their adolescent oldest child's mental health as fair, poor, or very poor
- **21%** of active-duty family respondents do not currently receive mental health care but would like to
- **67%** of military-connected family respondents report challenges with family building

**Military Children**

- **19%** of active-duty families with an adolescent oldest child report their child(ren) does not receive mental health care but they would like them to

  Of those, 23% report their child(ren) does not receive mental health care due to concerns about a mental health diagnosis preventing future military service

- **61%** of active-duty families report their oldest child enrolled in K-12 is thriving in his/her school

- **13%** of active-duty families are homeschooling their oldest child; Top reason: to stabilize my child(ren)'s educational experience

**Child Care**

- **24%** of active-duty family respondents can find child care that works for their situation

**TAKEAWAYS**

- Spouse un/underemployment is a top contributor to financial stress
- Child care remains a barrier to spouse employment
- Most military kids are thriving in school, but still experience barriers to mental health care

**1 in 10** active-duty spouse respondents have experienced one or more unhealthy relationship behaviors in the past year

1 in 3 active-duty spouses who are not working report child care is too expensive as a reason

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