



**BLUE STAR  
FAMILIES**

**MILITARY  
FAMILY  
LIFESTYLE  
SURVEY**



**Social and Community Context**

# **2021 Military Family Lifestyle Survey Comprehensive Report**

## **Diversity**

In collaboration with

**S** **Syracuse University**

**D'Aniello Institute for  
Veterans & Military Families**

JPMorgan Chase & Co., Founding Partner

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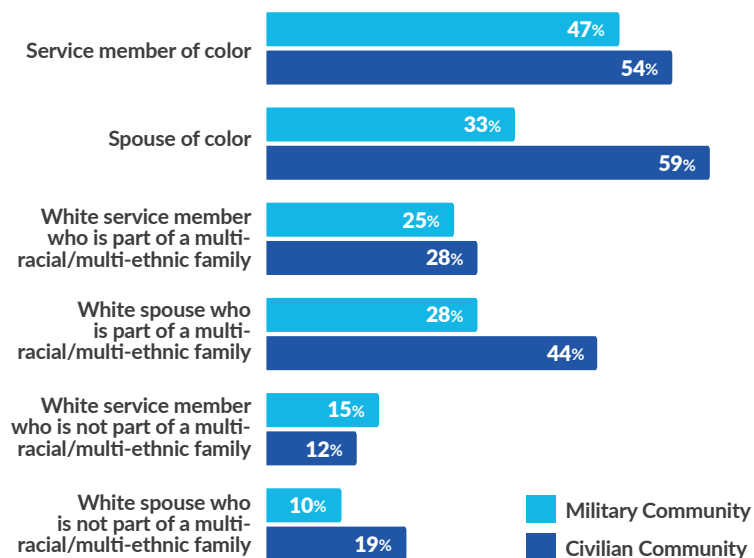


## Four in 10 active-duty family respondents believe there is less racial/ethnic discrimination in the military than there is in the general U.S. society. Despite the benefits of diversity to the military community, experiences of discrimination impact military family belonging.

The military, in large part, reflects the diversity of the country they serve. While the racial/ethnic composition of the United States military as a whole is more diverse than the population of the country, differences exist by race/ethnicity, service branch, and rank.<sup>1</sup> Among this survey's sample, 42% of active-duty service member and 25% of active-duty spouse respondents identify as having at least one racial/ethnic identity other than white, and 1 in 4 (24%) active-duty

### Figure 1: Experienced Racial Discrimination in the Military Community and Civilian Community

Active-duty service member and active-duty spouse respondents by race/ethnicity



family respondents report they are members of a multiracial/ethnic family.<sup>a</sup> Consistent with Blue Star Families' report, The Diverse Experiences of Military and Veteran Families of Color,<sup>2</sup> active-duty family respondents of color report experiencing instances of racial discrimination in both their military and civilian communities, with a greater proportion experiencing it in their civilian community than in their military community: more than half of service members (54%, n=149) and spouses of color (59%, n=482) have experienced racial discrimination in the civilian community, while fewer than half (47%, n=157) of service members and a third (33%, n=490) of spouses report the same for their military community.

Similar to the overall United States population, 6% (n=644) of active-duty service member respondents and 4% (n=3276) of active-duty spouse respondents identify as LGBTQ+. More

than half of those active-duty family respondents who identify as LGBTQ+ (61%, n=124) report having experienced sexual orientation-based discrimination in the civilian community (49%, n=125) and in the military.<sup>b</sup> This is inconsistent with previous research from 2017, which found only a quarter of LGBTQ+ individuals had experienced discrimination because of their sexual orientation or gender identity in 2016 in the U.S.<sup>3</sup> Factors unique to the military lifestyle –

<sup>a</sup>Respondents were asked: "Are you a member of a multi-racial/multi-ethnic family (e.g., do you have a spouse or child of a different race/ethnicity)?" Respondents may have identified as any race/ethnicity, and it is important to note that families who identify as multi-ethnic may have different experiences than families who identify as multi-racial.

<sup>b</sup>"In the military" encompasses experiences related to promotion/career advancement and interactions within unit/command, spouse groups, on installation, in military housing, on deployment, during military-connected training, accessing military health services, and other aspects of the military experience – broadly defined.





such as having limited say in where families live or being able to choose areas perceived to be LGBTQ+ friendly — or lagging effects of previous military policies that actively discriminated against LGBTQ+ service members<sup>4</sup> may influence perceptions of sexual orientation-based discrimination and warrant continued research and monitoring.

**Table 1: Religious Affiliations of Active-Duty Family Respondents**

Protestant	25%
Catholic	21%
Do not identify with any religious affiliation	18%
Evangelical Christian	11%
Agnostic	5%
Atheist	4%
Latter-day Saints	3%
Spiritual/Spiritualist	3%
Jewish	1%
Wiccan/Pagan	1%
Buddhist	<1%
Unitarian	<1%
Hindu	<1%
Islamic	<1%

The U.S. military is also religiously diverse, with active-duty family respondents identifying with a myriad of religious beliefs<sup>5</sup> or as unaffiliated, mirroring that of the greater U.S. population.<sup>6</sup> Most active-duty family respondents report having never experienced religious discrimination in their military community (88%) or their civilian community (85%). Nevertheless, the proportion of non-Christian-affiliated respondents who report experiencing religious discrimination (29%) is more than twice that of Christian-affiliated respondents (14%), and more than three times that of non-religiously-affiliated respondents (8%).

The military is taking action to address discrimination of all forms in the military community,<sup>7,8,9</sup> but it does not necessarily influence what families experience in the civilian community. Military families often lack a sense of belonging to their civilian communities,<sup>10</sup> and experiences of discrimination can be further detrimental to these feelings of belonging. Among active-duty family respondents who report experiencing racial discrimination in the civilian community,<sup>c</sup> 45% disagree that they feel a sense of belonging to their local civilian community (vs. 40% of those who have not experienced racial

discrimination in the civilian community). Of active-duty family respondents who have experienced religious discrimination in their civilian community, 48% disagree with the statement: “I feel a sense of belonging to my local civilian community” (vs. 40% of those who have not experienced religious discrimination in the civilian community).<sup>d</sup>

The military may have much to share with civilian communities about combatting discrimination, and there remains considerable work to be done to ensure parity of experiences across different racial/ethnic groups, genders, sexual orientations, and religious beliefs. Moreover, reinforcing and advancing the gains made in reaching parity is and should be a priority for the military as it has the potential for long-term implications to the sustainability of the force.<sup>11</sup>



<sup>c</sup>Experience of discrimination in the community can refer to a previous community, not respondents' current local civilian community.

<sup>d</sup>The impact of gender-based discrimination on belonging in the civilian community was not analyzed due to a disproportionate number of female respondents in both the active-duty spouse and active-duty service member sample. Sexual orientation-based discrimination was not analyzed due to the small sample size of respondents who identify as LGBTQ+.



## Limitations

There are multiple ways to define what constitutes “multi-racial” and “multi-ethnic.”<sup>12</sup> The Military Family Lifestyle Survey utilized a combination of respondent self-reporting to the questions: “How do you describe yourself?” and “Are you a member of a multi-racial/ethnic family (e.g., do you have a spouse or child of a different race/ethnicity)?” Responses were collapsed into three groups: respondents who did not select a racial/ethnic identity other than white and selected “No” to a multi-racial/multi-ethnic family, respondents who did not select a racial/ethnic identity other than white and selected “Yes” to a multi-racial/multi-ethnic family, and respondents of color. Respondents of color may also have identified themselves as being part of a multi-racial/ethnic family. Sample sizes are low in certain subgroups (racial/ethnic groups, LGBTQ+, and religious groups) and may be uneven among groups. Respondents’ religious affiliations were collapsed into Christian, non-Christian, and not religiously affiliated for comparative purposes following delineation set forth in numerous writings.<sup>13,14,15</sup>

## Recommendations

\*More information in Recommendations Chapter of Comprehensive Report

*For more in-depth recommendations on diversity, equity, and inclusion, refer to Blue Star Families’ Social Impact Research 2021: The Diverse Experiences of Military & Veteran Families of Color.<sup>16</sup>*



### Military

- Service branches should explore the viability of establishing a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) or racial equity and inclusion (REI) skill identifier or occupational specialty to seed this expertise throughout the force.
- Existing programs designed to support diverse families can be assessed to determine their effectiveness and expanded to other installations and service branches.
- Establish and/or support affinity groups at installations, especially in less diverse areas and/or areas in which there are documented incidents of discriminatory and/or racist behaviors.\*



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