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SURVEY**



Economic Stability

2021 Military Family Lifestyle Survey Comprehensive Report

Employment Satisfaction

In collaboration with



Syracuse University

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



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Though the majority of active-duty service member respondents are satisfied with their job, and 70% feel the work they do is meaningful, satisfaction is lower for female service members and service members of color. Most service member respondents who are dissatisfied are likely to look for another job in the next 12 months, and a smaller proportion recommend military service to others.

The majority of active-duty service members are satisfied with their job (67%) and their employer (64%); however, a smaller proportion report they are satisfied, compared to their civilian counterparts. Most Americans (87%) are at least somewhat satisfied with their job,^a as reported in 2021.¹ While many service members are under contract and unlikely to exit active-duty service immediately because of job dissatisfaction, those who are unsatisfied with their job pose a risk to both recruitment and retention of the All-Volunteer Force. Nearly seven in 10 active-duty service member respondents who are “somewhat dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” with their job are also “somewhat likely” or “very likely” to look for another job in the next 12 months. Dissatisfied service members are also more stressed than their satisfied counterparts.

Job satisfaction is linked to “perception of equal opportunities in the workplace, feeling of personal accomplishment, perception of teamwork and cooperation within one’s work team, level of training received, communication from management on key issues, recognition for good performance, and work-life balance.”² These aspects of job satisfaction may contribute to differences in satisfaction among branch, gender, and race/ethnicity. For example, active-duty Army service member respondents are less satisfied with their employer (59%) than their active-duty peers in the Air Force (66%) and Navy (63%).^b There are also notable differences in job satisfaction among female active-duty service members and active-duty service members of color. Female active-duty service member respondents report slightly lower levels of satisfaction with their job (66% vs. 69%) and employer (62% vs. 65%) than their male counterparts, which is consistent with other reports that military women rate unit climate lower and workplace hostility higher than their male peers.³ Further, job satisfaction affects the propensity of female active-duty service members to recommend service to a young person. While female service members are more likely at all levels of job satisfaction to recommend service to a young man than they are to a young woman, which is consistent with findings from the 2018 Military Family Lifestyle Survey (MFLS),⁴ among female active-duty service members who are dissatisfied with their jobs, just 21% would recommend military service

When asked what would increase the likelihood of staying with their current employer: **“Increase pay, remove arbitrary requirements that don’t make me better at my job, improve work environment, remove toxic leaders, and give me some control over my life.”**

Male Active-Duty Army Service Member

^aNote: Question wording and response options are not an identical match to MFLS.

^bSamples of active-duty Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and Space Force service members were too small to report individually. Army (n=106), Navy (n=79), and Air Force (n=184).



to a young woman, while 38% would recommend military service to a young man. Active-duty service members of color are also less satisfied with their job (62% vs. 70%) and their employer (57% vs. 68%) than their white peers.

The top issues of concern are similar for active-duty service member respondents who are satisfied with their job, compared to those who are dissatisfied.^c Active-duty service members who are dissatisfied with their job note the amount of time away from family (35%) as the top military life issue, followed by child care challenges (31%) and lack of control over military career (31%). The responses are similar to the top issues for their counterparts who are satisfied with their jobs. Like their civilian counterparts, pay is not the only driver of job attrition; elements such as work environment and a sense of purpose are driving the current exodus from the workforce.⁵ The top reasons noted by active-duty service members for why one may look for a new job in the next 12 months are job satisfaction (43%), higher pay (32%), and a better work environment (29%).



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Active-Duty Service Members



In contrast to their civilian peers who are leaving the workforce because they crave a sense of purpose in their work,⁶ a majority of active-duty service members feel the work they do is meaningful (70%), gives them a feeling of personal accomplishment (62%), and provides them a real opportunity to improve their skills within the organization (62%). However, fewer than half (45%) feel senior leaders generate high levels of commitment in the workforce, are satisfied with career advancement opportunities (45%), and feel their training needs are assessed (45%). Further, less than half of active-duty service members feel they have an opportunity to get a better job in the organization (42%).

In addition to overall satisfaction with their job and employer, there are notable differences for female active-duty service member respondents and active-duty service

member respondents of color in the level of agreement about aspects of their jobs, compared to their male and/or white counterparts. This finding runs counter to previous research suggesting that Black males and females, Hispanic/Latino males and females, and white females all experience greater perceived benefits to military service than white males along several dimensions of self-assessed job satisfaction and quality of life.⁷ In this year's MFLS, a smaller proportion of female service member respondents are satisfied with advancement opportunities and increasing their skills or training and report that their work contributions are valued.

^cSample size is low for this calculation. Respondent total is 99.



Table 1: Aspects of Job Satisfaction by Gender

% of active-duty service members who agree or strongly agree that...

	Male Active-Duty Service Members	Female Active-Duty Service Members
I am satisfied with the opportunity to get a better job in my organization.	47% (n=188)	39% (n=231)
I am satisfied with how much my work contributions are valued.	59% (n=191)	51% (n=240)
My training needs are assessed.	48% (n=191)	43% (n=235)
I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in my organization.	64% (n=193)	60% (n=240)

Compared to white active-duty service member respondents, active-duty service member respondents of color are less satisfied with their opportunities for advancement, promotion, and increasing their skills, and fewer agree that discussions about their performance with supervisors are worthwhile or that senior leaders generate motivation and commitment, which is consistent with previous Blue Star Families research.⁸

For active-duty respondents, employee satisfaction matters. Although service members who are

dissatisfied may not be able to leave right away due to the time remaining in their current contract or orders, it appears likely they will leave if conditions do not improve. In addition, a smaller proportion of female active-duty service member and service member of color respondents agree they have a chance for advancement or an opportunity to improve their skills,⁴ compared to their peers, suggesting avenues for further exploration to determine what other factors may influence promotion trajectories.⁹

Aspects of Job Satisfaction by Race/Ethnicity

% of active-duty service members who agree or strongly agree that...

Active-Duty Service Members of Color*	White Active-Duty Service Members
46% (n=167)	59% (n=207)
Discussions with my supervisor about my performance are worthwhile.	
38% (n=168)	49% (n=212)
In my organization, senior leaders generate high levels of motivation and commitment in the workforce.	
45% (n=161)	57% (n=207)
I feel satisfied with my chances for promotion.	
60% (n=167)	70% (n=213)
I am satisfied with the work that I do.	
40% (n=163)	50% (n=206)
I am satisfied with the career advancement opportunities that my organization offers.	
55% (n=168)	65% (n=212)
I am given a real opportunity to improve my skills in my organization.	



⁴Some of these differences could be influenced by the particular job speciality of active-duty service member survey respondents.

*Racial/ethnic identity was asked as a "Select all" question. Respondents were categorized as a "person of color" if they selected at least one racial/ethnic identity other than white.



Limitations

Adults employed full or part time were asked “How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your job?”, with answer options “Completely satisfied, Somewhat satisfied, Somewhat dissatisfied, or Completely dissatisfied”, or “No opinion”, with no “Neutral” option. The 2021 MFLS asked “Considering everything, how satisfied are you with the following? Your current/most recent job” with answer options, “Very satisfied”, “Somewhat satisfied”, “Neither”, “Somewhat dissatisfied, or Very dissatisfied”, or “Does Not Apply”. 10% of active-duty service member respondents selected “Neither”.

Samples of active-duty Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and Space Force service members are too small to report individually. In comparison, Army (n=106), Navy (n=79), and Air Force (n=184) have a larger respondent sample. In the 2021 MFLS, there is also a larger female service member sample than typical in an overall sample pool of service members. The current career field of the active-duty service member, not accounted for in this survey, can greatly impact their satisfaction and their ability to promote and should be taken into consideration. Furthermore, while samples are too small to analyze these differences here, recognizing how multiple historically-marginalized identities intersect may provide more context for understanding race/ethnicity and gender differences.¹⁰

Recommendations

*More information in Recommendations Chapter of Comprehensive Report



Military

- Expand the Workplace and Gender Relations Survey of Active Duty Members to include broader workplace climate concerns (e.g., perceptions of equal opportunities in day-to-day assignments, time away from family, etc.).
- Continue to expand efforts to provide service members more control over their careers (including when and where they relocate) and day-to-day schedules.
- Expand and formalize mentorship opportunities for service members of color and female service members.¹¹



Congress

- Commission a report to assess the viability of flexible work options for service members and making leave opportunities more flexible to address short-notice and short-duration personal and family concerns.*
- Require all Service branches to conduct exit surveys and interviews of all service members; survey instrument should include questions related to work climate. (e.g., Department of the Army Career Engagement Survey)¹²



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