



## Military Family Lifestyle Survey

# 2022 Comprehensive Report

## Respondents and Methodology

In collaboration with

**S** Syracuse University

D'Aniello Institute for  
Veterans & Military Families

JP Morgan Chase & Co., Founding Partner

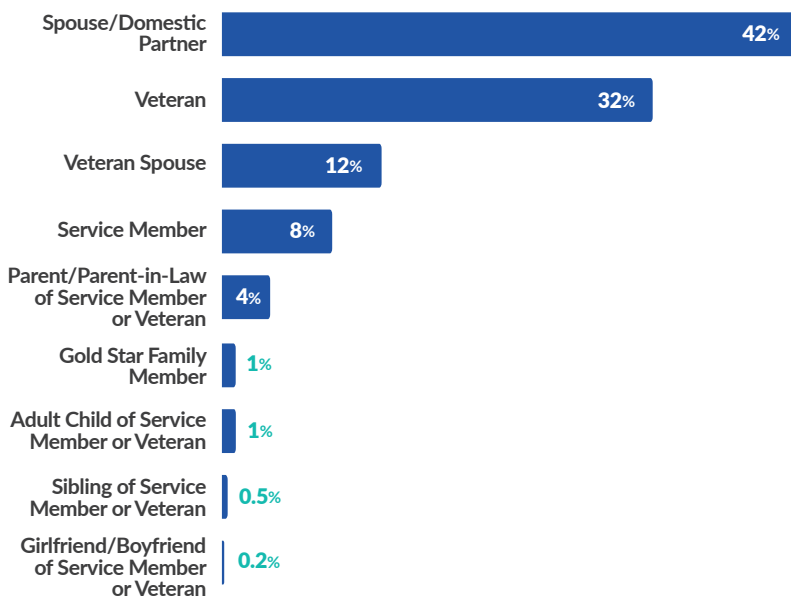
Funding for the 2022 Military Family Lifestyle Survey is provided through the generosity of our presenting sponsor The USAA Foundation, Inc. Supporting sponsors include JP Morgan Chase & Co., Lockheed Martin, CSX, AARP, Craig Newmark Philanthropies, Macy's Inc., BAE Systems, Northrop Grumman, American Council of Life Insurers, and Pratt & Whitney.

## Respondents

The widespread distribution of the 2022 survey through Blue Star Families' networks and partners in the military community has allowed it to remain the largest and most comprehensive survey of active-duty service members, Veterans, and their families since its inception in 2009. After cleaning the data to remove duplicates and invalid responses (see Methodology for full details), 9,363 responses remained. Of the 9,363 respondents who started the survey, 57% (5,214) completed the entire questionnaire. The respondents represent a cross-section of active-duty service members, National Guard and Reserve service members, Veterans, and their immediate family members from all branches of service, ranks, and regions — both within the United States and on overseas military installations. While recruitment efforts focused on obtaining a diverse and representative sample, the survey samples of active-duty, National Guard, Reserve, and Veteran families differ from those populations in several important ways, and cannot be considered representative of the entire population.

**Figure 1: Primary Relationship to Service**

All respondents (n=9,363)



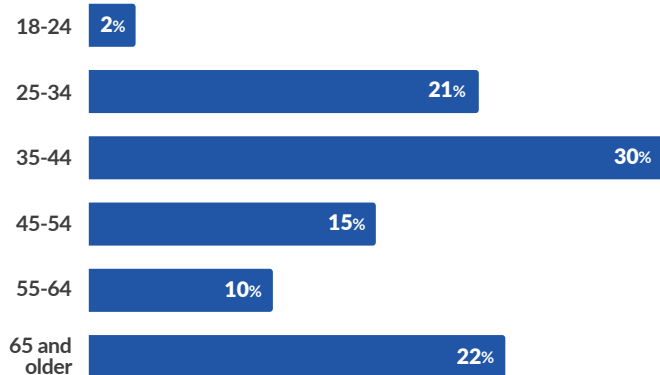
## Definitions

Many members of the military community have multiple military affiliations, such as a Veteran who is a current spouse of an active-duty service member. To account for this, survey respondents were asked **first** to identify *all* their current affiliations with the military. For example, respondents could identify themselves as a “spouse/ domestic partner of an active-duty service member,” “National Guard service member,” and/or “Veteran/ retired service member.” A **second** question then asked participants to select their *primary military affiliation* with the instructions that respondents would use this perspective to answer the survey. For the purpose of this report, “primary military affiliation” is defined as the affiliation a respondent chose as their primary identity.

“Active-duty family” respondents include those respondents who selected “active-duty service member” or “active-duty spouse” as their primary military affiliation

**Figure 2: Age**

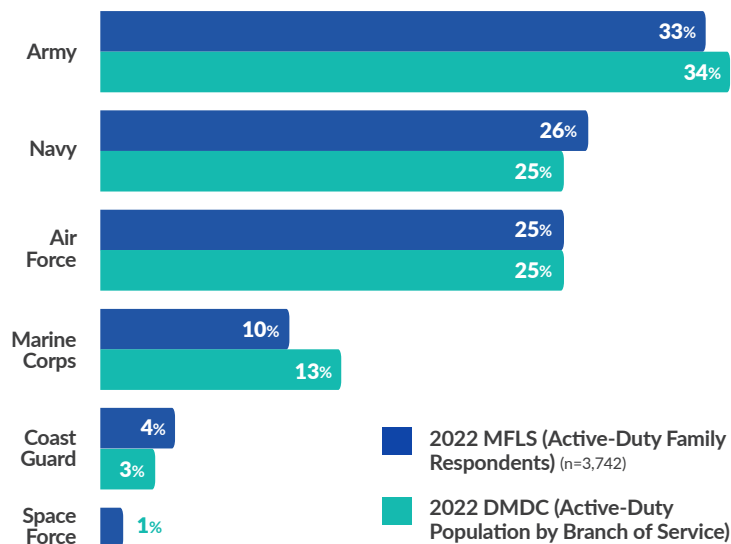
All respondents (n=9,243)





and do not refer to a service member-spouse dyad. Due to the nature of the survey and recruitment methods, there is a robust sample of active-duty spouse respondents, which impacts the presented active-duty family responses. Military-connected family respondents refer to active-duty, National Guard, and Reserve service members, spouses

**Figure 3: Branch of Service**



of active-duty, National Guard, and Reserve service members, and Veterans and spouses of Veterans. Currently-serving family respondents refer to active-duty, National Guard, and Reserve service members, and spouses of active-duty, National Guard, and Reserve service members.

### Gender and Sexual Orientation

In this report, gender and sexual orientation identification are asked in two separate questions, consistent with recommendations from the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, “lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer (LGBQ+)” refers to the reported sexual orientation and does not include gender identity.

To collect statistics on gender identity, respondents were asked “What is your gender?” and for the purpose of reporting, “female” respondents include those respondents who selected “woman” or “trans woman” and “male” respondents include those who selected “man” or “trans man.”

### Race/Ethnicity

The survey utilized a select-all, combination race/ethnicity question recommended by the U.S. Census Bureau.<sup>2</sup> “Respondents of color” include those who selected American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black/African American, Hispanic or Latino/a/x or of Spanish origin, Middle Eastern or North African, or Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. They could also select white and/or a write-in option, but not as the only option. As a result, respondents of color in this report could select multiple racial/ethnic identities, and their responses may therefore be reflected in multiple comparison groups when racial and ethnic groups are analyzed separately. For example, respondents identifying both as “Black” and “Asian” are counted in both analyses, but only once when aggregated “respondents of color” are reported.

In addition to the reported race and ethnicity of the survey respondent, for some analyses, the race and ethnicity of the respondents’ immediate family members was also salient. More than a quarter of all active-duty family respondents (26%) reported they were part of a multiracial/ethnic family, larger than the 10%<sup>3</sup> of the married U.S. adult population who are in interracial or interethnic marriages.<sup>a</sup> These respondents’ perceptions and experiences may differ from their peers who do not have immediate family members of a different race or ethnicity, as

<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. Census data refers only to adults married to a spouse of a different race or ethnicity.

demonstrated in previous Blue Star Families' research.<sup>4</sup> For these analyses, "white, non-Hispanic respondents not in multiracial/multiethnic families" are defined in this report as respondents who only selected white (and no other answer choices) to the race/ethnicity select-all question and answered they are not a member of a

multiracial/ethnic family (e.g., "Do you have a spouse or child of a different race/ethnicity?").

"White, non-Hispanic respondents in multiracial/multiethnic families" only selected white (and no other answer choices) to the race/ethnicity select-all question and also reported they are a member of a multiracial/ethnic family.

## Respondent Demographics

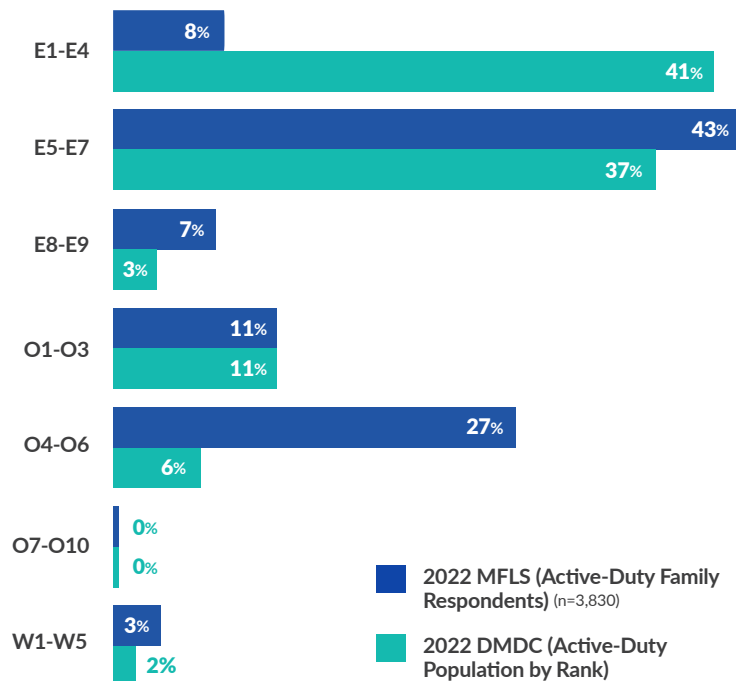
Of all survey respondents, the most commonly selected primary identity is spouse/domestic partner of a service member including National Guard and Reserve (42%), followed by Veteran/retired service member (32%), spouse/domestic partner of Veteran/retired service member (12%), service member including National Guard and Reserve (8%), parent/parent-in-law of a service member/Veteran (4%), Gold Star family member

(1%), adult child of a service member/Veteran (1%), sibling of a service member/Veteran (0.5%), and girlfriend/boyfriend of a service member/Veteran (0.2%).

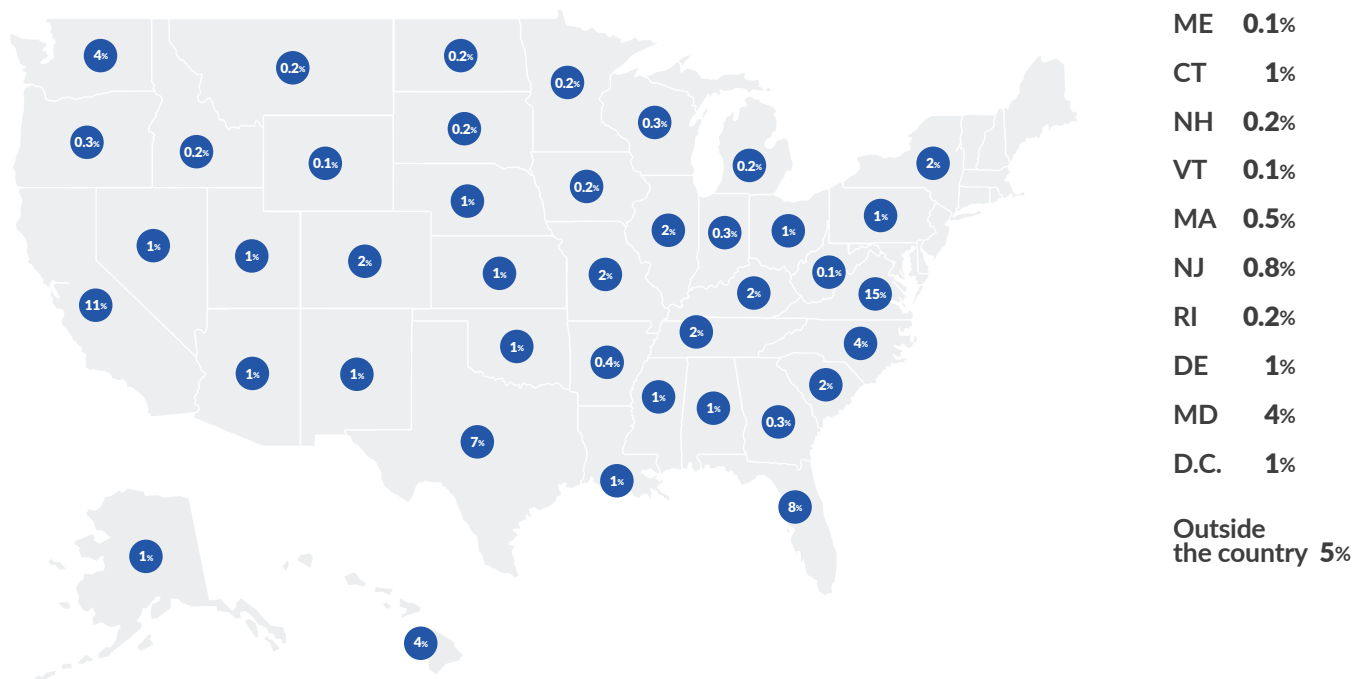
Of all respondents, the single largest age group was ages 35-44 (30%), followed by those who are 65 and older (22%), 25-34 (21%), 45-54 (15%), 55-64 (10%), and 18-24 (2%).

Approximately 94% of all respondents lived within the continental U.S., and 6% lived outside the continental U.S. Within the U.S., the largest groups of respondents lived in Virginia (10%), Florida (9%), California (8%), and Texas (8%).

**Figure 4: Service Member Rank**



**Figure 5: Geographic Location of Active-Duty Family Respondents (n=3,884)**



## Active-Duty Family Respondents

“Active-duty family respondents” in this report include active-duty service members and active-duty spouse respondents. This sample of active-duty family respondents represents a greater percentage of married, older, and senior-ranking respondents than in the active-duty population as a whole. The sample also obtained a larger proportion of female service members (45%) than present in the active-duty population (18%).<sup>5</sup>

In response to the select-all question for race/ethnicity, 78% of active-duty family respondents selected white, followed by Hispanic or Latino/a/x or of Spanish origin (12%), Asian (7%), Black/African-American (7%), American Indian/Alaska Native (3%), Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (2%), and 2% selected a write-in option. Eleven percent of active-duty family respondents selected more than one option.

Most services were represented at rates within a few percentage points of the active-duty force, except for the Marine Corps, which was slightly undersampled. Army respondents were sampled at 33% compared to 34% of the total active-duty force; Navy respondents were sampled at 26% compared to 25% of the total active-duty force; Air Force respondents were sampled at 25% compared to 25% of the total active-duty force; Marine Corps respondents were sampled at 10% compared to 13% of the total active-duty force; Coast Guard respondents were sampled at 4% compared to 3% of the total active-duty military force; and Space Force represented 1%.<sup>6</sup>

The active-duty family respondent sample included a greater proportion of mid-grade enlisted (E5-E7) and field/mid-grade officer (O4-O6) family respondents than is reflected in the military population.<sup>7</sup> The largest

group of active-duty family respondents represented were mid-grade enlisted (E5-E7, 43%) followed by field/mid-grade officer ranks (O4-O6, 28%). Company/junior grade officers (O1-O3) represented 11%, junior enlisted (E1-E4) family respondents represented 8%, senior enlisted (E8-E9) represented 7%, warrant officers (W1-W5) represented 3%, and general/flag grade officers (O7-O10) were the smallest group at 0.3% of the overall active-duty respondents.

### Military Service

Among currently serving service member respondents, 72% were serving on active duty, 15% were serving with the Reserve, and 13% were serving with the National Guard. Of Veteran respondents 39% reported that they served September 2001 or later.

### Spanish-Language Survey Respondents

In 2022, for the first time, the full survey instrument was translated into Spanish, and respondents were offered the choice of taking the survey in either English or Spanish. Seventy-nine respondents elected to answer the Spanish-language survey, although they were not asked whether they use more than one language. There are certainly respondents who selected the English-language survey who identify as Hispanic or Latino/a/x, and/or use Spanish, as some respondents to the Spanish-language survey do not identify as Hispanic/Latino/a/x and/or also use English. See Spanish Spotlight for more information on this sample.



### Methodology

The 2022 Military Family Lifestyle Survey instrument was designed by Blue Star Families in collaboration with Syracuse University's D'Aniello Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) with extensive input from military family members and advocates, subject matter experts, and policymakers who work with military families. The survey was conducted online in English and Spanish with approval from Syracuse University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and administered using Qualtrics' survey system (Qualtrics, Inc., Provo, Utah) from May 23 to July 10, 2022. The survey uses a convenience sampling method.

Respondent recruitment and outreach channels included awareness-building with a focus on military families via email distribution from the Blue Star Families mailing lists and social media dissemination (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, blog posts, and partner websites) in both English and Spanish and outreach from a myriad of military family, military, and Veteran service nonprofits, supportive service and professional organizations, as well as individual volunteers, for both the English and Spanish language versions of the aMFLS.

Recruitment and outreach were designed to enhance representation from historically underrepresented groups, such as Black and Hispanic/Latino/a/x respondents, junior enlisted families, and National Guard and Reserve families. For 2022, additional recruitment and outreach efforts were explored to reach potential respondents for the Spanish-language version of the aMFLS. Sampling was not stratified, nor were results weighted to be representative. Possible biases were introduced through the utilization of a nonprobability sampling method, particularly dealing with gender, marital status, age, rank, and/or race/ethnicity representation among service member and family member respondents. For example, approximately 10% of Veterans are female compared to the 27% of Veteran respondents in this survey.<sup>8</sup> Without reweighting, this overrepresentation or underrepresentation means this sample cannot be generalized to the entire military and Veteran-affiliated community. Nevertheless, this sample provides both directions for research and exploration and perspectives of subpopulations such as female service members that would be marginalized in more representative samples.

Respondents could access the survey from a computer or mobile device through several links shared via email, websites, social media pages, etc. The survey began with a consent form which explains the study's objective, risks, and benefits. Consent was required to participate. All questions except for the consent and primary military identity were voluntary, and respondents could skip any questions they did not feel comfortable answering. Survey branching and skip logic techniques were used to allow survey respondents to avoid questions that were not pertinent to them. For example, sections related to the needs of military children were only shown to those who reported they had children. Therefore, including missing data considerations, the actual number of respondents per question varied throughout the survey.

After survey closing, researchers conducted a rigorous, multistep data cleaning protocol, including removing invalid responses. For removal, responses had to meet several criteria agreed upon by researchers, including, but not limited to, completion of the survey in less than five minutes, nonsensical phrases repeated across respondents or across multiple answers for the same response, and duplicate responses. For additional

information regarding this protocol, please contact [survey@bluestarfam.org](mailto:survey@bluestarfam.org). After cleaning the data, the total sample was 9,363 English-language respondents and 79 Spanish-language respondents.

The survey questions were a combination of multiple-choice and open-ended questions to allow for diverse responses from participants. Responses of “Does not apply” were usually excluded from analyses. In addition to original questions, this survey also includes measures aimed at providing standardized and scientifically validated instruments, such as the Relationship Assessment Scale.<sup>9</sup> Analyses primarily included frequencies and cross-tabulations. Additional tests were conducted and statistical significance was assessed for specific analyses, and is indicated where appropriate in this report.

For this report, 15 open-ended questions were chosen for qualitative analysis from the English-language survey. These questions are related to key focus areas of the survey, such as recommending military service to a young family member, children’s education, bullying, access to health care, and relocation challenges. The analysts used a content analysis methodology to identify key themes from the data. First, the data was reviewed for emergent themes; second, each response was categorized by relevant theme(s); third, a final tabulation of responses by theme was created. After each question was analyzed, quotes were identified to illustrate each theme. The survey team used these themes and quotations to complement and illustrate the findings. Quotations are used throughout this report to bring depth and context to understanding the numbers behind this survey.

Qualitative data was also used to inform categorization of the ratings for the item “How likely are you to recommend that a young family member (child, niece, nephew, etc.) join the military?” on a scale of 0-10. Ratings of 0-3 were categorized as “Unlikely to recommend” because qualitative responses to the subsequent question “Can you tell us why you would recommend or not recommend service to a young family member?” were overwhelmingly negative, with codes such as “toxic,” “woke,” “discrimination,” “very hard life,” “takes a toll,” and “hard on families.” Ratings of 4-6 were categorized as “Neutral” because the qualitative responses provided with those ratings were mixed and included positive and negative qualities in similar proportions and included conditions, with codes such as “depends on the person,” “only if officer,” “only if not married,” and “not for long-term/only a few years.” Ratings of 7-10 were categorized as “Likely to recommend” because responses with these ratings were predominantly positive, with codes such as “good experience,” “great benefits,” “builds job skills,” and “a good foundation for starting off.”

Spanish-language translation of the 2022 aMFLS involved multiple steps. After creation of the English language survey instrument, the full survey was translated into Spanish. The Spanish-language version of the survey was entered into Qualtrics and then beta-tested by volunteers fluent in Spanish. Feedback from beta testing was incorporated into the final Spanish-language survey instrument.

Any comparisons made between the 2022 data and previous years’ data are intended only as comparisons of absolute percentages, and changes were not tested for statistical significance. It is important to note that question and answer option wording may shift from year to year to better reflect changing military family experiences, and this, in addition to the shifting sample each year, limits the comparability of the survey results from year to year.



## Endnotes

**Support Circles: Social support and mental health services are important to helping military families through common life stressors.**

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**Family Relationships: While military life experiences such as PCS and family separation may be stressful, everyday life stressors of spouse employment, access to child care, and financial security have significant ties to relationship satisfaction.**

- 1 Karney, B. R., Loughran, D. S., & Pollard, M. S. (2012). Comparing Marital Status and Divorce Status in Civilian and Military Populations. *Journal of Family Issues*, 33(12), 1572–1594. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X12439690>
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- 3 Karney, B. R., Loughran, D. S., & Pollard, M. S. (2012). Comparing Marital Status and Divorce Status in Civilian and Military Populations. *Journal of Family Issues*, 33(12), 1572–1594. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X12439690>.
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**Military Family Resource Access: A greater proportion of active-duty family respondents who had used civilian resources in the 12 months prior to survey fielding reported feeling a sense of belonging to their civilian community compared to their peers who had not used any civilian resources.**

- 1 Trail, T. E., Sims, C. S., and Tankard, M. (2019) *Today's Army Spouse Survey: How Army Families Address Life's Challenges*, RAND Corporation, RR-3224-A, 2019. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR3224.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR3224.html)
- 2 Garcia, J., Vargas, N., Clark, J. L., Magaña Álvarez, M., Nelons, D. A., & Parker, R. G. (2020). Social isolation and connectedness as determinants of well-being: Global evidence mapping focused on LGBTQ youth. *Global Public Health*, 15(4), 497–519. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2019.1682028>
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**Veteran Healthcare and Social Support: Health care needs, perceived health care access and quality, and perceived network resources differ for working-age and aging Veterans.**

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### Health Care & Disordered Eating: While a valued benefit, TRICARE coverage has limitations that can result in out-of-pocket medical expenses for some military-connected families.

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- 2 Ibid.
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**Children’s Mental Health: One in three (32%) active-duty family respondents with at least one child in grades K-12 for the 2021-2022 school year had a child (20 years or younger) experience bullying on school property in the 12 months prior to survey fielding.**

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**Military Children's Education: The majority (74%) of active-duty military families with at least one child enrolled in grades K-12 report they do not know about the Interstate Compact on Education Opportunity for Military Children. However, those who have used the Interstate Compact to advocate for their child report positive outcomes.**

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**Housing: Concerns about "BAH/Off-base housing" is a top-five military life issue for the first time. Active-duty family respondents continue to pay well over the expected cost-share to secure housing, while satisfaction with their housing situation declines for those who relocated more recently.**

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**Veteran Financial Wellness Spotlight: Most Veteran respondents said their family was “doing okay” financially or “living comfortably,” but housing costs, major home repairs, and excessive credit card debt were primary stressors. For aging Veteran respondents, however, medical costs were also cited as a top source of financial stress.**

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