

**Blue Star Families
Military Life Issues Survey
Executive Summary
May 5, 2009**



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Sharing the Pride of Service

Overview

In March 2009, Blue Star Families (BSF) conducted an online survey of **2,796** military family members. This survey followed a similar January 2009 pilot BSF survey that was distributed via email to the Blue Star Families membership. For this survey BSF was honored to have its partner organizations, the American Red Cross, the United Service Organizations (USO), National Military Family Association, the Armed Forces YMCA, Military.com and Military Spouse Magazine, distribute the survey through their networks. The wider distribution of this survey through our partners greatly contributed to the high level of response, and we believe this survey's ability to reach a more representative sample of military personnel and their families.

Survey Respondents Profile

The **2,796** respondents represent a diverse sample of military family members from all branches of services, regions of the country and overseas military installations. The vast majority of respondents (83 percent) were not members of Blue Star Families. Eight-eight percent of respondents completed the entire survey.

Respondent's Service Member Primary Relationship	Percentage
Self	17
Spouse	66
Child	5
Parent	8
Sibling	1
Other	2

Survey respondents were asked to identify their primary relationship with the military based on the service member through whom they receive Department of Defense dependent benefits, if applicable. Half of the survey's respondents had more than one immediate family member affiliated with the military. Military personnel that responded to the survey listed their primary relationship to the military as self.

In addition to asking respondents to rate national and military life issues and services affecting them, the survey also asked if respondents agreed with the following statement:

"The general public (i.e., civilians without close ties to the military) does not truly understand or appreciate the sacrifices made by service members and their families."

Ninety-four percent of respondents agreed with this statement, 73 percent of respondents reported that they "completely agree" with this statement.

Most of the survey respondents (72 percent) were affiliated with active-duty military personnel, 5 percent were affiliated with the Reserve, eight percent with the Drilling Guard, Drilling Reserve or the Inactive Drilling Guard, 15 percent with retired military. A majority of respondents were affiliated with enlisted service personnel (64 percent), and four percent of survey respondents reside in overseas military installations. Survey respondents residing in the United States were fairly evenly distributed across the country.

Eighty-one percent of respondents were female, and 59 percent of respondents had minor children living at home with them. Fifty-eight percent of survey respondents were between the ages of 25 and 44.

Branch of Service	Percentage
Air National Guard	2
Army National Guard	19
Air Force	19
Army	36
Navy	15
Marine Corps	7
Coast Guard	1
Public Health	2

Initial Survey Findings

For the purposes of this initial survey analysis the BSF Research Team decided to focus on self and spouse respondents. The following tables present *only* the responses for self and spouse respondents. Subsequent BSF Research Briefs will focus on other demographic groups that participated in this survey, including the children, parents and siblings of service members.

National Issues

Question Wording: What national issues most concern or affect you? Please RATE EACH ISSUE, from 1 = Not at All Important to 5 = Extremely Important. What national issue is MOST IMPORTANT to you?

National Issue	Average Rating (Out of 5)	% Rated Extremely or Very Important	% Rated the Most Important Issue
Economy	4.5	89	25
War in Iraq and Afghanistan	4.5	89	25
Veterans Services	4.5	87	10
Terrorism	4.2	78	9
Education	4.3	82	8
Government Corruption	4.1	74	8
Health Care	4.3	80	7
Housing Market/Foreclosure Crisis	3.7	59	3
Immigration	3.4	49	2
Taxes	3.9	68	2
Environment	3.5	53	1
Transportation/General Infrastructure	3.2	39	0.2

Services to Military Families

Question Wording: Please RATE your satisfaction with each of the following services to military families from 1 = Extremely Dissatisfied to 5 = Extremely Satisfied. (If you have no experience with a particular service, please choose N/A.) What service to military families is MOST IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT?

Services to Military Families	Average Rating (Out of 5)	% Rated Extremely or Very Dissatisfied	% Rated as Most In Need of Improvement
Military Health Care System - Quality	3.2	26	16
Military Health Care System - Access	3.2	30	16
Tricare Insurance	3.5	21	15
Base Housing – Quality	2.9	38	10
Mental Health Services	3.0	34	10
Base Housing - Availability	2.8	41	10
Financial Assistance/Counseling	3.2	23	5
Marital/Family Counseling	3.1	27	4
Child Development Centers/School Age Services	3.2	29	4
Morale, Welfare and Recreation	3.6	14	3
Department of Defense Education Activity Schools	3.3	23	3
Commissary and Exchange	3.8	11	3
Chaplain Services	3.8	12	1

Military Life Issues

Question Wording: How concerned are you about each of the following military life issues? Please RATE EACH ISSUE with 1 = Not At All Concerned to 5 = Extremely Concerned. What military life issue are you MOST CONCERNED about?

Military Life Issue	Average Rating (Out of 5)	% Rated Extremely or Very Concerned	% Rated as Most Concerned
Military pay/benefits	4.4	85	23
Operational tempo/Deployments/ Training time	4.2	76	15
PTSD/ Combat Stress/ TBI	4.2	78	14
Effect of deployments on kids	4.4	84	11
Moral/ emotional support for families of deployed service members	4.2	80	7
Post-deployment family readjustment	4.2	79	7
Spouse employment opportunities	3.8	63	5
Services/communications to military family members living outside of a military base	3.9	67	5
Educational opportunities for kids	4.0	71	3
Educational opportunities for spouse	3.7	62	3
Tangible/practical support for families of deployed service members	3.8	64	3
PCS adjustments	3.6	57	2
Educational opportunities for service member	3.7	60	1
Service member ability to take maternity/paternity leave	3.2	44	1

Two questions were asked about the respondent's service member's time away from home due to Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), and training/field time, schooling, work ups, TDY assignments, or other non-accompanied assignments.

Deployments and Other Family Separations

Question Wording:

Since September 11, 2001, approximately how many total months has your service member been DEPLOYED in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and/or Operation Enduring Freedom?

Since September 11, 2001, how many additional months has your service member been separated from the family members he/she typically lives with due to training/field time, schooling, work ups, TDY assignments, etc.? Please make your best estimate.

Family Separation Duration Since September 11, 2001	Deployment – % of Respondents	Non-Deployment – % of Respondents
Less than 6 months	26	27
6-12 months	22	31
13-24 months	29	22
25-36 months	14	10
37-48 months	4	4
Over 48 months	4	5

Households with Minor Children

A comparison of the survey results for households with minor children versus those without minor children is presented in the tables below. Again, these responses are *only* from the self and spouse survey participants. This analysis also excluded those respondents affiliated with retired service members.

Services to Military Families	Households with Children		Households without Children	
	<i>% Rated Extremely or Very Dissatisfied</i>	<i>% Rated as Most In Need of Improvement</i>	<i>% Rated Extremely or Very Dissatisfied</i>	<i>% Rated as Most In Need of Improvement</i>
Tricare Insurance	21	12	21	16
Military Health Care System – Access	31	15	28	15
Military Health Care System – Quality	29	17	25	16
Department of Defense Education Activity Schools	27	4	18	2
Child Development Centers/School Age Services	30	5	26	2
Morale, Welfare and Recreation	14	4	16	3
Commissary and Exchange	12	2	8	4
Chaplain Services	11	1	13	1
Mental Health Services	32	7	36	14
Marital/Family Counseling	26	4	29	4
Financial Assistance/Counseling	25	5	21	4
Base Housing – Quality	40	12	40	11
Base Housing - Availability	44	11	40	9

Households with Minor Children, continued

The differences between responses from households with children and those without children on most issues are very small. However, as one would expect, households with children were much more concerned with the effect of a service member's deployment on their children and with educational opportunities available to military children.

Military Life Issue	Households with Children		Households without Children	
	% Rated Extremely or Very Concerned	% Rated as Most Concerned	% Rated Extremely or Very Concerned	% Rated as Most Concerned
Operational Tempo/ Deployments/Training time	77	15	77	18
Effect of deployments on kids	91	16	70	3
PTSD/Combat Stress/TBI	76	10	82	19
Military pay/benefits	85	22	84	19
Post-deployment family readjustment	80	7	79	7
Spouse employment opportunities	62	5	72	9
PCS adjustments	60	2	55	1
Educational opportunities for service member	58	1	65	1
Educational opportunities for spouse	64	3	66	4
Educational opportunities for kids	80	4	53	0.4
Services/communications to military family members living outside of a military base	67	5	71	6
Service member ability to take maternity/paternity leave	45	1	52	1
Moral/emotional support for families of deployed service	81	6	81	10
Tangible/practical support for families of deployed service members	67	3	61	2

Additional Data for the May Event

At the May event Blue Star Families plans to present the research results included in this executive summary, as well as:

- Analysis of the open-ended responses
- Comparative results by service member's rank
- Comparative of results by service member's branch of service
- Respondent profile of the self and spouse participants

Future Research Briefs

Blue Star Families Research Team will continue to analyze the results from this survey through Summer 2009. Specifically, we will replicate the analysis presented in this document for the self and spouse respondents for the following groups:

- Guard and Reserve
- Parents/Siblings/Children
- Retirees

Blue Star Families Research Team will strive to connect our efforts with our partners and with current military family research.

Comments or suggestions may be directed to the Blue Star Families Research Team:

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