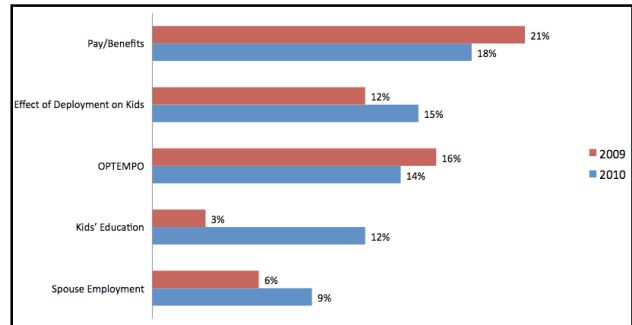


## 2010 Military Family Lifestyle Survey

In May 2010, Blue Star Families fielded an online survey of 3,634 military family members to determine the major issues facing military families today. The key concerns identified by the responding military families are: **pay and benefits**, the current **operational tempo**, the **effects of deployments on children**, **spouse employment**, and **children's education**.

Additionally, it's clear that military families are experiencing **high levels of stress**. After nearly a decade of war, it is understandable that nearly all respondents reported that their stress level increases during their service member's deployments.

Supporting military families is integral to our national security, and there is much more that needs to be done. However, the work has begun, as evidence from one of the promising findings of the survey - military families are beginning to feel more support from the civilian community. In the 2009 survey, ninety-four percent of respondents either agreed completely or somewhat with the statement: *"The general public does not truly understand or appreciate the sacrifices made by service members and their families."*



And while in the 2010 survey, ninety-two percent of respondents said the same, there was a **seven-point decline in respondents who agreed completely**. Since the 2009 survey was fielded, the challenges and sacrifices of military family life have received wide spread attention, ranging from local community outreach to the federal government and the White House.

68% of respondents had volunteered in the past year!

Military families are also keenly aware of the need to support each other, and often help each other and their local communities. Survey respondents demonstrated heavy participation in volunteerism and a reliance on online and social media for support and connection.

### Survey Highlights

**OP TEMPO:** Since September 11, 2001, seventy-two percent reported that their spouse had been away from home for more than twenty-five months.

**Pay/Benefits:** Eighteen percent of respondents listed pay/benefits as their top military family life issues. Of those respondents, eighty-four percent said that they were having trouble making ends meet, or that they felt their service members' military pay was low.

**Spouse Employment:** Forty-nine percent of spouses felt that being a military spouse had a negative impact on their ability to pursue a career. Of the sixty-one percent of spouses not employed outside the home, forty-eight percent wanted to be employed. Of those spouses whose careers have been negatively impacted by active-duty military activities, more than thirteen percent believe they have experienced some type of discrimination due to their status as a military spouse.

**MyCAA:** Fifty-five percent of respondents would like to use the program My Career Advancement Accounts (MyCAA) in the future. More than half (across all ranks) indicated a desire for help with bachelors or graduate degrees.

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Effects of Deployments on Children: Seventy-one percent of respondents with children indicated that they would like more support for their children during a deployment.

Children's Education: Between frequent moves and service member time away from home, many parents worry about their children getting a good education. A full thirty-four percent are "least or not confident" that their children's school is responsive to the unique military family life.

Volunteerism: Military family members are connected to the bigger picture of community and giving. Survey participants report a sixty-eight percent volunteer rate in the past year, compared to a national average of just under twenty-seven percent. Of note, the majority of volunteerism was through informal efforts, such as assisting friends and neighbors with meals, childcare, or similar activities. This type of informal support is clearly an important area for military families, and one that the civilian community can easily participate in.

Social Media: As with the civilian community, social media use is prevalent throughout military families, with nearly ninety percent of respondents reporting some type of use. Of those who use social media, eighty-eight percent do so at least once a week. Military families rely heavily on social and online media during deployments, with eighty-nine percent using email to communicate with their service member.

For news media, MilitaryOneSource.com, Military.com, and Military Spouse Magazine (Milspouse.com) are the top three preferred, regularly visited online information locations across all respondents. These three represent the primary online sites military family members go to for information about the military.

### **Conclusion**

Military service penetrates what is generally considered the private sphere of family to an extent unmatched by civilian employment. Additionally, concern about family issues has become increasingly central for the Department of Defense and our civilian leadership as a result of the increased reliance on the military since September 11, 2001. This reliance necessitates new approaches to maintain and increase the appeal of military service to current and new service members, as well as their families, in order to help sustain our national defense. While there is continuous effort made to streamline and transform military family support and readiness programs to lead to more effective coordination and implementation, there are still gaps that need to be addressed.

We hope this report prompts more dialogue about the experiences of military families during this increased operational tempo for our nation's service members, and by extension, their families. We need policies that adapt to the changing needs of our military families and a strengthening of the networks, both military and civilian, that support them in order to make the military lifestyle not only sustainable, but desired.



The full survey results will be available on Blue Star Families' website ([www.bluestarfam.org](http://www.bluestarfam.org)) in October 2010. For additional information, please contact Vivian Greentree, Director of Research and Policy: [vgreentree@bluestarfam.org](mailto:vgreentree@bluestarfam.org).