



MFLS
2025

Quality of Life and the Future of Service:
Military Family Lifestyle Survey Findings

Methods



We are deeply grateful to our sponsors: AARP, Chobani, Lockheed Martin Corporation, Macy's, Inc., and USAA for their generous support of the 2025 Military Family Lifestyle Survey (MFLS). We also want to extend our heartfelt thanks to The BlackRock Foundation, craig newmark philanthropies, CSX Transportation, and the Patrick J. McGovern Foundation for their ongoing support of Blue Star Families as a whole. Your contributions enable us to continue serving military families with impactful programs and research year-round.

Procedure

The 2025 Military Family Lifestyle Survey instrument was designed by Blue Star Families with input from Syracuse University's D'Aniello Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF), military family members, subject matter experts, and policymakers who work with military families.

This 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), and outreach from multiple military family, military, and veteran service nonprofits, and professional organizations. Specific variables were closely monitored during fielding (e.g., branch of service, rank, proximity to BSF Chapter locations) to ensure as representative a sample as possible. Accordingly, there was a focus on sharing the survey information with individuals who were underrepresented while fielding (e.g., National Guard service members, junior enlisted families).

The survey was conducted from May 14–June 30, 2025, using Qualtrics online survey software. 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 explained the study's objective, risks, and benefits. Consent was required to participate. All questions except for consent, age, 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. The survey questions were a combination of multiple-choice and open-ended questions to allow for qualitative responses from participants. The full survey was translated into Spanish and available to participants in Qualtrics.

Participants

After cleaning the data to remove duplicates and invalid responses, there were 6,127 respondents to the 2025 survey (6,115 English-language respondents and 12 Spanish-language respondents). Of the 6,127 respondents who started the survey, 72% ($n=4,432$) completed the entire instrument.

All Respondents

Ages of all respondents to the survey ranged from 18 to 94 years ($M=47.7$, $SD=15.6$, $n=6,127$). The most commonly selected primary military affiliation was spouse/domestic partner of an active-duty service member (36%, $n=2,207$), followed by veteran/retired service member (33%, $n=2,034$), spouse/domestic partner of a veteran/retired service member (13%, $n=812$), active-duty service member (7%, $n=401$), spouse/domestic partner of a National Guard service member (2%, $n=124$), parent or parent-in-law of a service member (2%, $n=108$), adult child of service member of veteran (2%, $n=101$), spouse/domestic partner of a Reserve service member (2%, $n=94$), National Guard service member (1%, $n=77$), Reserve service member (1%, $n=63$), Gold Star spouse (0.6%, $n=36$), sibling of service member of veteran (0.4%, $n=23$), parent or parent-in-law of veteran/retired service member (0.3%, $n=19$), girlfriend or boyfriend of service member or veteran (0.2%, $n=14$), Gold Star parent (0.1%, $n=7$), and other Gold Star family member (0.1%, $n=7$). The largest groups of respondents lived in Florida (11%, $n=616$), California (10%, $n=568$), Virginia (9%, $n=500$), Texas (8%, $n=449$), and North Carolina (5%, $n=275$).

Active-Duty Family Respondents

'Active-duty family respondents' in this report represent respondents who selected active-duty service members ($n=401$) or spouse/domestic partner of an active-duty service member ($n=2,207$). Most services were represented at rates within a few percentage points of the active-duty force.¹ Army active-duty family respondents were sampled at 32% ($n=827$) compared to 34% of the total active-duty force; 28% ($n=712$) of active-duty family respondents were Navy compared to 26% of the total active-duty force; Air Force respondents were sampled at 23% ($n=604$) compared to 23% of the total active-duty force; Marine Corps active-duty families were sampled at 11% ($n=282$) compared to 13% of the total active-duty force; Coast Guard active-duty family respondents were sampled at 5% ($n=128$) compared to 3% of the total active-duty military force; and Space Force represented 1% ($n=36$) compared to 0.8% of the total active-duty force.

The group of active-duty family respondents represented were junior enlisted (E-1–E-4, 9%, $n=224$), followed by mid-grade enlisted (E-5–E-6, 29%, $n=749$), senior enlisted (E-7–E-9, 24%, $n=608$), warrant officers (W-1–W-5, 4%, $n=91$), company/junior grade officers (O-1–O-3, 11%, $n=275$), field/mid-grade officer ranks (O-4–O-6, 24%, $n=624$), and general/flag grade officers (O-7–O-10) was the smallest group at 1% ($n=13$) of the overall active-duty family respondents. Compared to the total active-duty force, this survey sample represents a larger proportion of senior ranking families and has undersampled junior enlisted families.²

Ages of active-duty family respondents ranged from 18 to 74 years ($M=36.5$, $SD=7.4$, $n=2,608$). In response to the select-all question for race/ethnicity, 75% ($n=1,879$) of active-duty family respondents selected white, followed by Hispanic or Latino/a/x or of Spanish origin (16%, $n=401$), Black/African American (7%, $n=174$), Asian (7%, $n=166$), American Indian/Alaska Native (3%, $n=74$), Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (1%, $n=36$), 1% ($n=30$) selected a write-in option, and 0.6% ($n=16$) identified as Middle Eastern or Northern African. Ten percent of active-duty family respondents reported that they or any member of their immediate family (spouse/partner, child) identified as LGBTQIA+. Most respondents (79%, $n=1,969$) had children who lived at home with them full or part time.

Ninety-five percent ($n=2,025$) of active-duty spouse respondents identified as female. Fifty-eight percent ($n=228$) of active-duty service members identified as male and 41% ($n=164$) identified as female.

Veteran and Spouse of Veteran Respondents

Among veteran/retired service members ($n=2,034$), the mean age was 61 years old ($SD=14.4$). More than half were retired (53%, $n=990$) and 74% ($n=1,477$) identified as male. Roughly three-quarters (73%, $n=1,444$) were married.

Among veteran spouse respondents ($n=812$), the mean age was 52 years old ($SD=12.1$). Most (92%, $n=713$) identified as female. More than three-quarters (77%, $n=540$) reported their veteran spouse retired from the military. The majority (69%, $n=482$) had experienced military-to-civilian transition as a military spouse or partner.

Data Cleaning and Analyses

After survey closing, researchers conducted a rigorous, multi-step data cleaning protocol, including removing invalid responses. For removal, responses had to meet several criteria agreed upon by researchers such as duplicate responses or the repetition of nonsensical phrases across respondents or across multiple answers for the same respondent. For additional information regarding this protocol, please contact survey@bluestarfam.org.

¹ Department of Defense. "Defense Manpower Data." [dwp.dmdc.osd.mil](https://dwp.dmdc.osd.mil/dwp/app/dod-data-reports/workforce-reports), 2025. <https://dwp.dmdc.osd.mil/dwp/app/dod-data-reports/workforce-reports>.

² Defense Manpower Data Center, Department of Defense, and Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy. "2024 Demographics Dashboards: Interactive Profile of the Military Community." MilitaryOneSource. Department of Defense, 2026. <https://demographics.militaryonesource.mil/chapter-2-active-duty-personnel>.

Responses of “does not apply” were typically excluded from analyses. Analyses primarily included frequencies and cross-tabulations. When applicable, additional tests were conducted and statistical significance was assessed for specific analyses, and is indicated where appropriate within the report.

Open-ended questions were analyzed using 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.

Research Notes

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 18%³ of the active-duty service member population is female, compared to 41% (n=164) of active-duty service member respondents to the 2025 survey.

Due to survey skip logic, branching, and general survey attrition, the actual number of respondents per question varies throughout the survey. Sample numbers are reported to provide context for interpretation.

Any comparisons made between the 2025 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 the wording of questions and answer options may differ from year to year to better reflect changing military family experiences, and this, in addition to the shift in demographics of the convenience sample each year, limits the comparability of the survey results from year to year.

Glossary

Many members of the military community have multiple military affiliations, such as a veteran who is also the spouse of a current active-duty service member. To account for this, survey respondents were asked **first** to identify *all* their current affiliations with the military. 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.

‘Active-duty family’ respondents include those respondents who selected “active-duty service member” or “spouse/domestic partner of an active-duty service member” as their primary military affiliation and do not refer to a paired service member-spouse couple. 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.

³ U.S. Department of Defense, Defense Manpower Data Center, and Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy. “2024 demographics: Profile of the military community.” MilitaryOneSource, 2026. <https://demographics.militaryonesource.mil/>

‘Active-duty spouse’ respondents include those respondents who selected “spouse/domestic partner of an active-duty service member” as their primary affiliation. In the case of employment-related statistics, there is a small group (n=85) of respondents who were excluded from the calculations: spouses who did select “spouse/domestic partner of an active-duty service member” and also indicated they were an active-duty service member (in response to the first question about all military affiliations).

‘n’ in this report refers to the number of respondents who selected an individual answer option. For example, in the question about unpaid caregiving, 445 active-duty family respondents selected “yes” and 1,966 selected “no.” In this report, this information is presented as 18%_(n=445) identified as unpaid caregivers.

‘N’ in this report refers to the total number of respondents who answered a specific item/question. For example, in the question about unpaid caregiving, 445 active-duty family respondents selected “yes” and 1,966 selected “no.” The total number (N) is 2,411.

‘Neighbor’ in this report refers to ‘civilian’ or non-military connected individuals in respondents’ local communities. An example item shown to respondents is “How likely or unlikely are you to share your military experiences with a civilian neighbor in your local community?”

‘Unpaid caregiver’ respondents are those who selected “yes” to the question “Would you consider yourself an unpaid caregiver?” The full question included the following definition: Unpaid caregiving is defined as care for ongoing medical, mental health, or developmental conditions, or serious short-term ones. The care you provide may include help with personal needs or household chores. It might be managing a person’s finances, arranging for outside services, or visiting regularly to see how they are doing. You do not need to live with this person to meet the definition of being their caregiver.

‘Veteran family’ respondents include those who selected “veteran/retired service member” or “spouse/domestic partner of a veteran/retired service member” as their primary military affiliation.