



# 2013 Military Family Lifestyle Survey

The comprehensive report is available on Blue Star Families' website:  
[www.bluestarfam.org](http://www.bluestarfam.org)

In November 2012, Blue Star Families fielded an online survey of military family members to determine the major issues facing them today. The key concerns identified by more than 5,100 military family members who responded were: **pay/benefits**, with specific emphasis on **changes to retirement benefits**, **military spouse employment**, the **effects of deployment on children**, and issues surrounding **military child education**. Additionally, the 2013 survey also uncovered valuable information on the following areas: relationships, suicide prevention, financial literacy, caregiving, communication, and public policy. This year's survey also continued to track how military families support each other, seek out resources, and stay connected to their communities and to their service members.

## Top Issues

### *Pay/Benefits and Changes to Retirement Benefits:*

Thirty-five percent of respondents listed pay/benefits as their top military family life issue while 22% of respondents cited changes to retirement benefits as their top concern. When veterans were asked about concerns related to separating from the military, their top concerns were employment possibilities and loss of income.

### *Military Spouse Employment:*

Sixty-eight percent of spouses reported that being a military spouse had a negative impact on their ability to pursue a career. Of the 61% who were not currently employed, 52% wanted to be. When asked their reasons for not working, 80% mentioned job market alignment. Twenty-three percent of spouses had faced challenges with their state licenses, certifications or other professional qualifications due to military-oriented moves across state lines at some point in their service member's career. Additionally, 26% currently operate their own business.

### *Effects of Deployment on Military Child Emotional Well-being and Development:*

Sixty-seven percent of respondents reported having one or more children currently living at home who were under the age of 18. Of those children, 93% had lived at home during the deployment or routine separation of a military parent. When asked how their children had been affected by the military parent's deployment, anxiety was a predominant response. Thirty percent of respondents sought out mental health counseling services to address the negative emotional impact of deployment. Of those who sought services, 72% found it helpful. Sixty-one percent chose a civilian provider, while only 23% chose a military provider. Respondents also reported positive aspects of their children's experiences in military life: 73% of respondents noted the adaptability of their children, 68% saw an increase in independence, 67% reported an increase in resilience, and 59% reported an increased sense of pride.

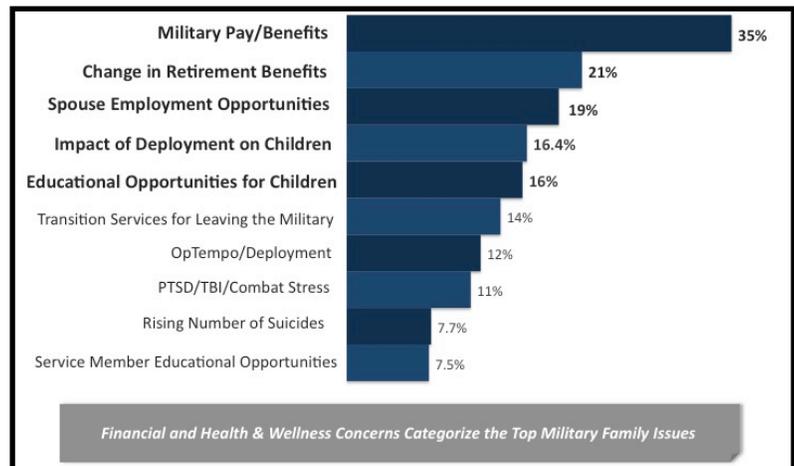
### *Military Child Education:*

Seventy-nine percent of respondents reported that their child's school engaged in parent/teacher conferences and 77% reported they were informed of school activities. However, 38% reported that the school was not aware of military life experiences such as transition and deployment and 39% did not feel their school was responsive or proactive to unique military situations. Fifty percent of respondents were unaware of the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children and only 29% of respondents reported that their school adhered to the interstate compact. Forty-seven percent of respondents were not aware of the School Liaison Officer program and only 25% reported that their schools were utilizing the Military SLOs. Thirty-three percent reported their school currently utilized peer support programs and 36% stated that deployment had negatively affected their children's participation in extra-curricular activities.

## Additional Findings Of Note:

**Social Media:** Seventy-two percent of respondents indicated that social media was important in communicating with their service member during deployment. Facebook became the most popular method of deployment communication in the 2013 survey, surpassing

## Percentage of Respondents Ranking Issue #1



email 85% to 81%. Overall, 88% of respondents used social media to connect with friends or family who did not live near them and 61% used social media to connect to other military families. Additionally, while 61% said their service members' unit used email to disseminate information and 52% said the unit used Facebook, only 37% said they used social media to get updates from the unit. The top three resources for online information-gathering were split between official and non-official sources: Facebook, Military OneSource, and Military.com.

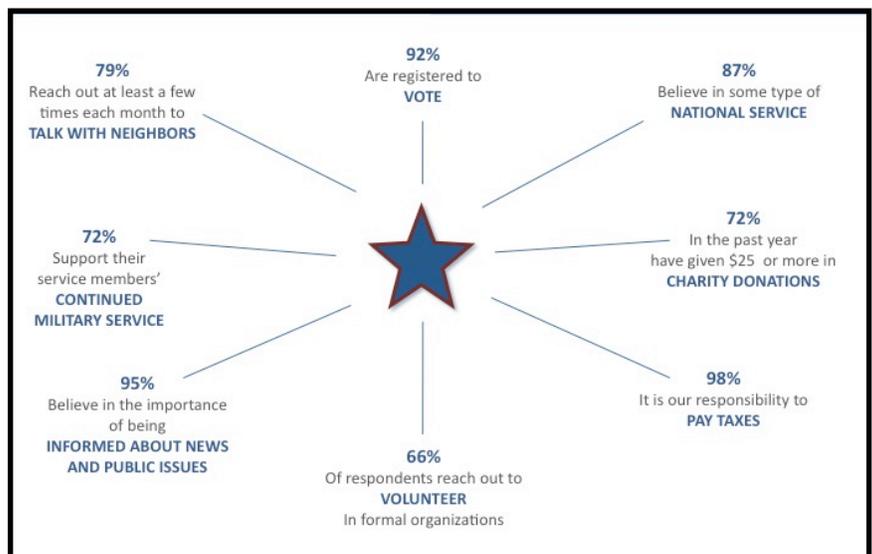
**Financial Readiness and Health:** Sixty-five percent of respondents said they experienced stress related to their family's current financial condition. The top three obstacles to financial security were: spouse employment (49%), uncertainty in military life (45%), and frequent moves (40%). When asked about financial education within the military community, only 12% of respondents received their financial education through service member training, while 90% said they wanted greater emphasis on preventative financial education. Eighty-seven percent of respondents used a household budget and 70% had checked their credit report or score in the past 12 months.

**PTS/TBI/Combat Stress:** Twenty-three percent of all respondents and 24% of spouse respondents reported PTS symptoms in their service member regardless of diagnosis whereas 19% of service members reported having a PTSD diagnosis and 21% reported symptoms regardless of diagnosis. Of those who reported that their service member had exhibited symptoms of PTS, 57% reported not seeking treatment through a military provider. Five percent of service members reported having been diagnosed with a TBI, and 4% of spouse respondents report their service members had exhibited symptoms of a TBI, regardless of diagnosis.

**Military Suicide:** Nine percent of military spouses and 18% of service members reported they had "ever considered suicide." Of those who reported having considered suicide, 30% of service members and 23% of spouses report not seeking suicide support services. Thirty-seven percent of respondents felt that the Department of Defense was handling the issue of suicide poorly. Respondents rated the following three topics as "very important" in preventing suicide: 1) counselors who understand the military lifestyle, 2) counselors receiving specialized training in how to work with service members and veterans, and 3) increased availability of mental health services.

**Volunteerism and Civic Engagement:** Engagement is a strong defining characteristic of the military community. Eighty-seven percent of respondents believed all Americans have a responsibility to participate in national service and 72% supported their service member's continued military service. Ninety-two percent of respondents were currently registered to vote, and 91% voted in the last presidential election. While 83% expressed satisfaction with the military lifestyle, 23% were enthusiastic promoters of military service, meaning they would recommend joining the military to their child or another young person. Active recommendation of service was captured using the Net Promoter Score methodology, which categories organizational loyalty into three types of people: promoters, passively satisfied, and detractors.

### Highlights of Civic Engagement



**Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP):** Nineteen percent of respondents had a family member enrolled in the EFMP. The top two supports for families were the chain of command and the local community. Respondents "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that some of the main challenges associated with moving for families with exceptional family members were finding new doctors (68%), obtaining educational accommodations (66%), and access to respite care (66%). Sixty-four percent of respondents reported difficulty accessing community/state based supports such as Medicaid waiver benefits.

**Public Policy – Don't Ask Don't Tell:** For the second year in a row, a majority of respondents felt the repeal of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) had no impact on a variety of issues. Seventy-five percent of respondents said it had no impact on their service member's ability to do his/her job and 72% said it had no impact on their service member's desire to re-enlist or stay in the military. Sixty-five percent said it had had no impact on their service member's morale and 62% said the repeal had no impact on mission readiness or national security. Seventy-one percent said it had had no impact on their desire to attend social functions and 64% of spouses said it had had no impact on their military support group's morale.