



# Military Family Lifestyle Survey



## Pride in Service

**Comprehensive Report** | **2024**

We are deeply grateful to our sponsors: The USAA Foundation, Lockheed Martin Corporation, Northrop Grumman Corporation, Macy's, Inc., AARP, and BAE Systems, Inc., for their generous support of the 2024 Military Family Lifestyle Survey (MFLS). We also want to extend our heartfelt thanks to Craig Newmark Philanthropies, CSX Transportation, TriWest Healthcare Alliance, the Patrick J. McGovern Foundation, Richmond Wholesale, and Pritzker Military Foundation on behalf of the Pritzker Military Museum & Library 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.

## Though 7 in 10 respondents say military service has added value to their family's life, only one-third would recommend military service to a young family member. While many Americans believe the public truly appreciates military families' sacrifices, few military families agree.

Military families are critical to national security and global stability. A majority of both Americans (67%)<sup>1</sup> and active-duty family respondents (83%) believe the U.S. will be involved in another major conflict in the next three to five years (Figure 1).

Additionally, a majority of both Americans (61%)<sup>2</sup> and active-duty families (63%) believe that military families are very or extremely important in creating a peaceful, stable world. This shared recognition highlights the essential role of military families in supporting service readiness and national security. As reflected in previous MFLS reports,<sup>3,4</sup> investing in their well-being, stability, and resources is crucial to sustaining both individual family resilience and the strength of our nation.

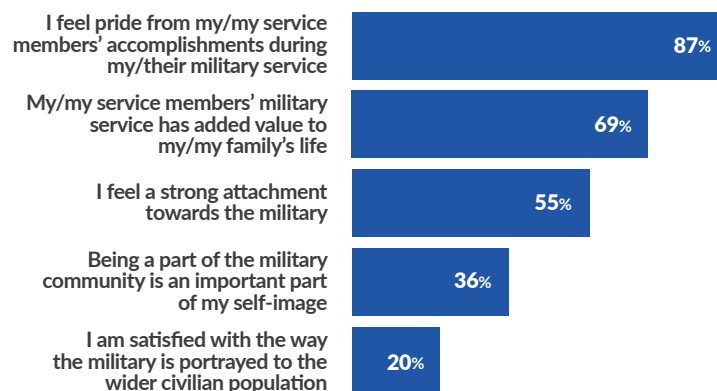
**Figure 1: Likelihood of Major U.S. Conflict in 3-5 Years**

Belief in the likelihood of the U.S. being involved in a major conflict in the next 3-5 years is likely or very likely



**Figure 2: Pride in Service**

% of active-duty family respondents who "agree" or "strongly agree"



Those who serve, and their families, are proud of their service. The majority of active-duty family respondents (87%) report they feel pride from their or their service member's accomplishments during military service and that military service has added value to their family's life (69%), and a majority (55%) feel a strong attachment to the military. In fact, the majority of active-duty service member respondents (55%) report they intend to serve for longer than they originally planned. Additionally, 39% of active-duty

family respondents had encouraged an acquaintance to join the military within the past five years, sharing the benefits of military service (Figure 2).

Active-duty family member respondents describe the various benefits the military provides to their families in the following ways. In open-ended responses, active-duty family respondents reported several key benefits the military provides to their families, along with major advantages of military service.<sup>5</sup> When

asked to answer the open-ended question, “How does your or your service member’s military service benefit your child(ren), if at all?” respondents described tangible benefits such as health care and financial stability, but also described the unique benefits of the military lifestyle in exposing their families to a variety of cultures and people they would not otherwise have experienced.

**Table 1: Five Most Commonly-Cited Family Benefits of Military Service**

Active-duty family respondents with at least one child living at home (n=2,038)

<b>Health care/health insurance</b>	We get excellent healthcare and services for our medically complicated child. — Active-Duty Navy Spouse
<b>Travel</b>	My children are proud of their dad's accomplishments and promotions. They have had the opportunity to easily move overseas and had travel opportunities most young kids wouldn't have access to. — Active-Duty Marine Corps Spouse
<b>Financial stability</b>	Healthcare, housing and income allows for me to stay home with our baby without worrying about finances. — Active-Duty Marine Corps Spouse
<b>Diversity</b>	My service exposes them to a very unique set of values and perspectives, and offers them the ability to meet and see people from all walks of life, including vastly different cultures than our own. — Active-Duty Navy Service Member
<b>Military experience</b>	They get to experience things most children won't such as different cities, ethnicities, and cultures. It will make them more well-rounded and appreciative of others. They'll also know what it is to be independent and self-sufficient. They learn the importance of routines and are more accepting of changes. — Active-Duty Army Spouse

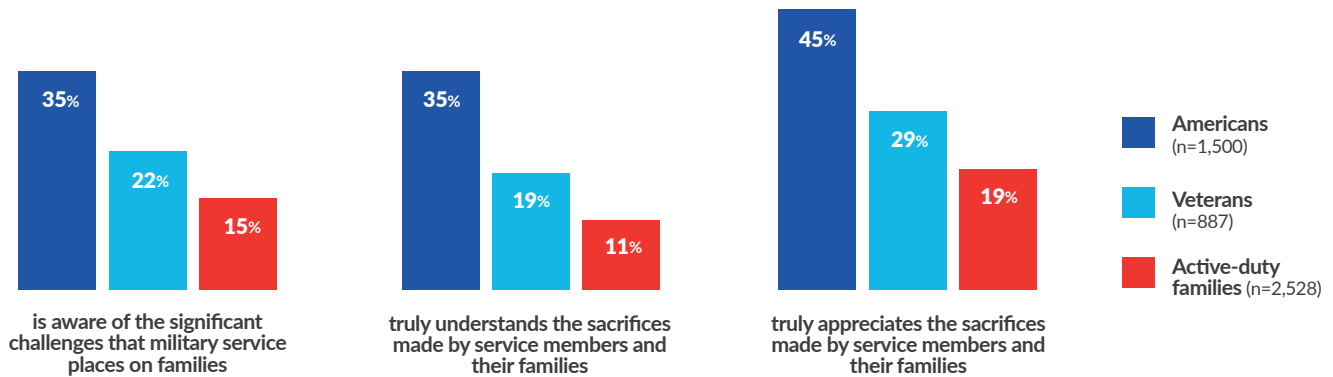
**Question text:** How does your/your service member's military service benefit your child(ren), if at all?

However, in recent years, military service members and their families have been used as leverage in political disputes, especially during budget negotiations, and bearing the brunt of political conflicts, such as government shutdowns. Only 1 in 5 military families (20%) say they are satisfied with how the military is portrayed to the wider civilian population. There is also a disconnect between what civilians think about the military and what military families perceive. Although many Americans believe they genuinely understand and appreciate the sacrifices made by military families, military families themselves do not always perceive this awareness, understanding, or appreciation.



**Figure 3: Awareness, Understanding, and Appreciation for Military Families**

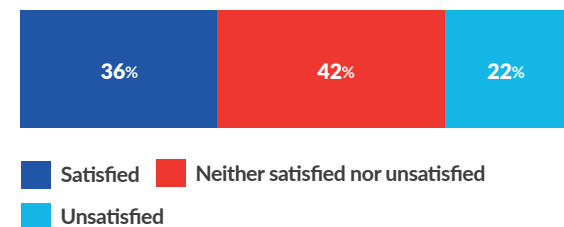
% who agree that the general public ...



While the sense of pride in serving the U.S. military remains strong for many, recent trends have highlighted a shrinking satisfaction with the military way of life<sup>6</sup> and a growing reluctance to recommend military service to future generations. Just one-third of active-duty spouse respondents (36%) are satisfied with the military lifestyle, a drop from the 49% of spouses in 2021 who were satisfied with the military way of life.<sup>7</sup> As for active-duty family respondents who are satisfied, only about half (56%) are likely to recommend military service to a young family member and about half (55%) have encouraged others to join the military in the past five years. Active-duty family respondents who are unsatisfied with the military lifestyle are significantly less likely to recommend military service to a young family member ( $M=2.47$ ,  $SD=2.57$ ) than those who reported they were satisfied with the military lifestyle ( $M=6.66$ ,  $SD=2.46$ ).

**Figure 4: Satisfaction with Military Life**

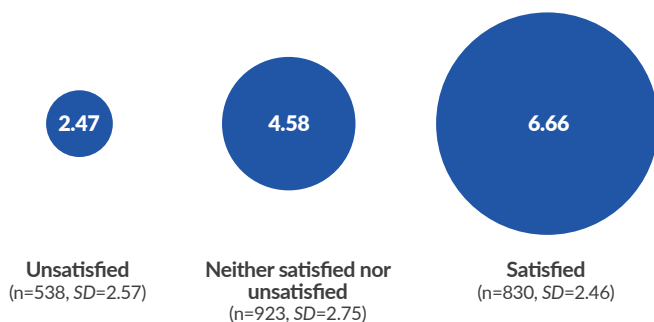
Active-duty spouse respondents (n=2,094)



**Question text:** Overall, how satisfied are you with the military way of life?

**Figure 5: Mean Likelihood to Recommend Military Service, by Satisfaction with Military Lifestyle**

Active-duty family respondents (n=2,291)



Scale 0-10, 0 = Very unlikely, 10 = Very likely

Continuing a trend identified in previous surveys,<sup>8</sup> only 1 in 3 (32%) active-duty family respondents report they would recommend military service to a young family member. This figure is notably lower than the 51% of American respondents who, in 2023, expressed a willingness to recommend military service.<sup>9</sup> To sustain an All-Volunteer Force, military service needs to be attractive enough that families are actively encouraging others to participate in this lifestyle.

The decline in the recommendation of military service reflects a growing sentiment of hesitancy among military families. This shift is closely tied to several ongoing concerns — spouse employment, child care, health care, housing and relocation, and children’s education — that may be discouraging individuals from endorsing a military career. While the federal government and the Department of Defense are taking clear and active steps to address these quality-of-life concerns, sustaining the All-Volunteer Force — particularly in a time of global uncertainty and the likelihood of major conflict — requires cross-sector support. A majority of U.S. adults (71%) believe that **Americans** have a responsibility to care for military families, but only 38% had done something to help someone in the military or a military family in the past year.<sup>10</sup> This gap underscores the need for collaborative strides toward improvement. To truly support military families and sustain the All-Volunteer Force, we need collective public understanding and action across sectors. Nonprofits, businesses, educational institutions, and local communities must come together to address the unique challenges facing military families. By joining efforts, we can create meaningful change that goes beyond policy, ensuring these families receive the resources, stability, and support they need to thrive.

32%

of **active-duty family respondents** would recommend military service to a young family member

51%

of **American respondents** expressed a willingness to recommend military service

Military service has a profound impact on the lives of service members and their families, offering purpose, pride, and a unique lifestyle. Arguably, these same characteristics bring significant challenges that shape their overall quality of life. As service members assess the benefits and drawbacks of their careers, their experiences influence whether they would recommend military service to others. Quality-of-life concerns — such as health care, housing, child care, and employment for spouses — are not just personal matters but topics that affect retention, morale, and readiness. To ensure military service members continue to feel pride and purpose in their roles, concrete steps must be taken to improve these support structures, enabling service members to focus on their mission and motivate them to remain in service until retirement. The collective effort of policymakers, military leaders, and civilian communities is essential to foster an environment where military service remains a fulfilling and honorable path for all who choose it.

## Recommendations



### Congress

- Establish the Commission on the Quality of Life within the Senate for the All-Volunteer Armed Force to assess quality-of-life considerations for the military and civilian workforces. (Senate-NDAA)
- Monitor the implementation of the Quality of Life Report recommendations to determine how they have impacted service members and their families, including effects on retention and the likelihood to recommend service.



### DOD

- Remove automatic access to service members' dependents' records in regard to Military Entrance Processing Stations (MEPS) and require dependents to sign a medical release waiver that mirrors their civilian counterparts.
- The DOD should review its special and incentive pay programs, as well as assess the effect of non-monetary incentives to increase retention.<sup>11</sup>
  - Bonuses and incentive pay as well as assignment flexibility and educational opportunities.



### MSOs & VSOs

- MSOs and VSOs should take the lead on equalizing the narrative around military service, ensuring that the benefits of services are portrayed as often as the challenges faced by families.\*
  - MSOs, VSOs, and community groups should take the lead on increasing military cultural competence within civilian communities, and provide volunteering and connection opportunities to bridge the gap between military families and their civilian neighbors.\*

\*More information in Recommendations Chapter of Comprehensive Report

## Endnotes

- 1 Blue Star Families. (2024). Americans' perspectives on military families. [Infographic].  
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- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Office of People Analytics. (2023). 2021 Active Duty Spouse Survey Results.  
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- 9 Snyder, S. (2024, January 11). Survey: Many would still recommend military service. AUSA.  
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