



# Empowering Governments to Effectively Support Local Military Families: Empirically-Driven Recommendations

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## References:

### 1. Civil-Military Divide

- a. The majority of active-duty respondents in the 2019 Military Family Lifestyle Survey feel their local civilian community does **not** truly understand and appreciate the sacrifices made by service members and their families.<sup>1</sup>
- b. Only **8% of active-duty respondents** believe the general public **understands** their sacrifices and only **12%** of active-duty respondents feel **the general public is aware** of the challenges that military service places on families.<sup>2</sup>
- c. Frequent moves and the growing civil-military divide contribute to military families rarely feeling they belong in their local communities -- in fact, the **2019 MFLS** found that **40% didn't feel a sense of belonging to their local civilian community.**<sup>3</sup>
- d. Over one third of military family respondents in the 2019 Military Family Lifestyle Survey said they do not have anyone in their community to ask for a favor and no friends in their local community to talk to.<sup>4</sup>
- e. When military families believe that their civilian neighbors understand, appreciate, and respect the sacrifices local military families make, they feel a greater sense of belonging to their local civilian community, according to the 2019 MFLS.<sup>5</sup>
- f. Belonging is important to the well-being of active-duty military and veteran families. Feeling deprived of belonging can lead to severe depression and mental distress,

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<sup>1</sup> Blue Star Families (2020). 2019 Military Family Lifestyle Comprehensive Report. Blue Star Families. <https://bluestarfam.org/survey/>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Ibid



while a sense of belonging is associated with the ability to cope with military-life stress.<sup>6</sup> **Greater belonging is associated with greater resilience.**<sup>7</sup>

- g. Greater resilience, including greater protective factors of belonging to the local community and social support, is associated with reduced COVID-19 impacts.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Relocation and Families with Children who have Special Needs

- a. The average military child moves three times as often as their civilian peers.<sup>9</sup>
- b. Dependent children's education is one of the top five issues for active-duty military families in the 2019 MFLS, with 42% of active-duty family respondents identifying it as such.<sup>10</sup>
- c. Military families homeschool at higher rates than civilians -- 11% of military family respondents in the 2019 MFLS reported homeschooling their children, for reasons including stability and flexibility.<sup>11</sup>
- d. 28% of active duty family respondents with a child with special needs and at least one child eligible for K-12 education **have homeschooled** or are **currently homeschooling**, compared to 21% of families with children eligible for K-12 who did not report special needs.<sup>12</sup>
- e. 22% of military family respondents in the 2019 MFLS indicated they had chosen to geo-bach in the past five years; among those, 32% cited their children's education was the reason they chose to do so<sup>13</sup>.
- f. Particularly during COVID, families with children who have special needs are more stressed and isolated and less resilient than their peers. Active-duty families with at least one child with special needs perceived less support from the community; they reported less perceived military family lifestyle cultural competence, poorer

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<sup>6</sup> Malone, G. P., Pillow, D. R., & Osman, A. (2012). The general belongingness scale (GBS): Assessing achieved belongingness. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 52(3), 311-316. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2011.10.027>

<sup>7</sup> COVID-19 Military Support Initiative. Resilience Under Stress Study Report. Unpublished work.

<sup>8</sup> COVID-19 Military Support Initiative. Resilience Under Stress Study Report. Unpublished work.

<sup>9</sup> Department of Defense Education Activity. (2019) *All About DoDEA Partnership*. Department of Defense Education. Retrieved from <https://www.dodea.edu/Partnership/about.cfm>

<sup>10</sup> Blue Star Families (2020). 2019 Military Family Lifestyle Comprehensive Report. Blue Star Families. <https://bluestarfam.org/survey/>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Blue Star Families. 2019 Military Family Lifestyle Survey. Unpublished data.

<sup>13</sup> Blue Star Families (2020). 2019 Military Family Lifestyle Comprehensive Report. Blue Star Families. <https://bluestarfam.org/survey/>



community leadership, poorer community engagement, and less belonging to the local civilian community, which are all protective factors that support resilience.<sup>14</sup>

### 3. Military Spouse Employment and Unemployment Insurance

- a. Military families' inability to earn two incomes (military spouse unemployment) is causing undue financial stress<sup>15</sup>.
- b. **Financial stress is the top stressor** of military life for active-duty families.<sup>16</sup>
- c. A greater percentage of younger generations of military families report that **dual incomes are vitally important** to their family's well-being, regardless of service member rank.<sup>17</sup>
- d. 77% of employed military spouse respondents in the 2019 MFLS experience some degree of underemployment. The top employment barriers among unemployed military spouses are: service members' day-to-day job demands, lack of access to affordable childcare, and having to start over after frequent moves.<sup>18</sup>
- e. 24% of military spouses reported being unemployed pre-pandemic,<sup>19</sup> which could grow to 30% in the wake of COVID-19.<sup>20</sup>
- f. On average, 17% of military spouse respondents who had been employed prior to the pandemic reported they had lost their job or were unable to work.<sup>21</sup>
- g. Among those military spouses who continued to work during COVID-19, 13% reported they were taking paid time off or unpaid leave in order to support child care or education needs; only 6% said the same of their service member spouse.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> COVID-19 Military Support Initiative. Resilience Under Stress Study Report. Unpublished work.

<sup>15</sup> Blue Star Families (2020). 2019 Military Family Lifestyle Comprehensive Report. Blue Star Families. <https://bluestarfam.org/survey/>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Blue Star Families (2019). 2018 Military Family Lifestyle Comprehensive Report. Blue Star Families. <https://bluestarfam.org/survey/>

<sup>18</sup> Blue Star Families (2020). 2019 Military Family Lifestyle Comprehensive Report. Blue Star Families. <https://bluestarfam.org/survey/>

<sup>19</sup> Defense Manpower Data Center Office of People Analytics. (2018). The 2017 Survey of Active Duty Spouses. (DMDC Report No. 2018-006). Office of People Analytics <https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Surveys/Survey-Active-Duty-Spouses-2017-Overview-Briefing-MSO.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> COVID-19 Military Support Initiative (2020). Pain Points Poll Deep Dive: Understanding the Impact of COVID-19 on Military Spouse Employment. Retrieved from <https://bluestarfam.org/covid19-research/>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.



- h. 40% of military spouse respondents reported they believe employers in their local communities are not eager to hire them.<sup>23</sup>

#### 4. Exceptional Family Member Program and Military Family Healthcare Access

- a. 40% of military family respondents who have a family member currently enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) reported they are not able to receive a referral and be seen by a specialist in a reasonable amount of time after relocating to a new duty station<sup>24</sup>.
- b. 22% of military family respondents reported they, or a family member, are enrolled in the EFMP, and half (48%) of these families reported relocation issues as a top stressor.<sup>25</sup>
- c. 78% of military family respondents who said they are taking steps to support their mental health during COVID-19 reported “spending time outdoors every day”.<sup>26</sup>
- d. 47% of caregiver respondents indicate their special needs child is unable to maintain continuity of care.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Blue Star Families (2020). 2019 Military Family Lifestyle Comprehensive Report. Blue Star Families.

<https://bluestarfam.org/survey/>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> CMSI (2020). Pain Points Poll Week 10 Roll-Up. Available at:

[https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/200608\\_PPP\\_COMPREHENSIVE\\_ROLL-UP\\_wk10.pdf](https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/200608_PPP_COMPREHENSIVE_ROLL-UP_wk10.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> CMSI (2020). Pain Points Poll Week 3 Roll-Up. Available at:

[https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/200410\\_PPP\\_COMPREHENSIVE\\_ROLL-UP\\_wk3.pdf](https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/200410_PPP_COMPREHENSIVE_ROLL-UP_wk3.pdf)



## Further Reading:

- Blue Star Families. Military Family Lifestyle Survey Comprehensive Reports. Available at: <https://bluestarfam.org/survey/>
- COVID-19 Military Support Initiative Military and Veteran Research Library. Available at: <https://bluestarfam.org/covid19-research/>
  - Pain Points Poll Deep Dive: Understanding the Impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health. Available at: [https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/BSF-COVID-PPP-DeepDive-MentalHealth\\_ver2.pdf](https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/BSF-COVID-PPP-DeepDive-MentalHealth_ver2.pdf)
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- "The Silent Shortage: How Immigration Can Address the Large and Growing Psychiatrist Shortage in the United States" New American Economy, October 2017. Available at:
  - [http://www.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/NAE\\_PsychiatristShortage\\_V6-1.pdf](http://www.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/NAE_PsychiatristShortage_V6-1.pdf)