



FOOD INSECURITY AMONG MILITARY AND VETERAN FAMILIES DURING COVID-19

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Introduction

This survey was fielded online during the first quarter of 2021 to understand how COVID-19 impacted military and veteran families' ability to get enough food during the previous 12 months. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Six-Item Short Form Food Security Scale was used to measure the food stability of 1,363 respondents, all of whom were connected to military life. **Results showed an increase in frequency of food insecurity as well as pandemic-related causes of food instability among participants.**

1 in 5
respondents was
experiencing
food insecurity.

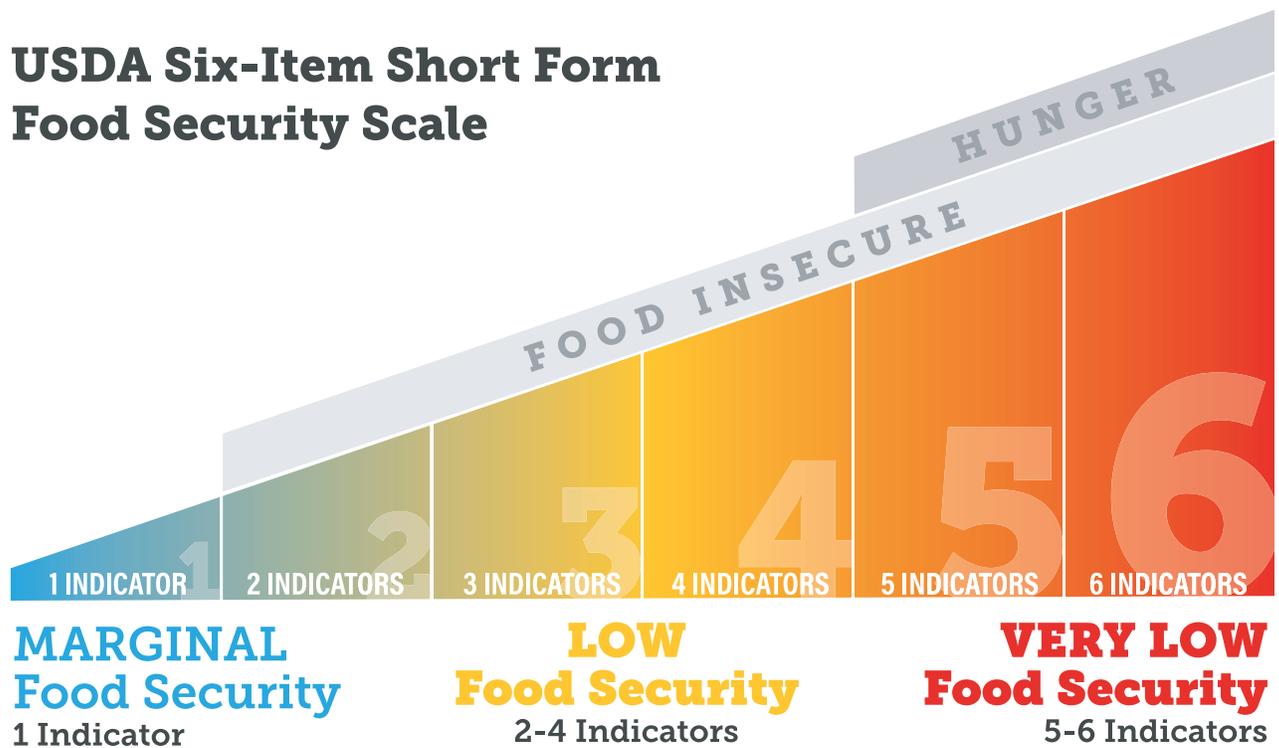




Food insecurity was measured using the USDA's Six-Item Short Form Food Security Scale.

The USDA scale uses six statements and questions to evaluate food security. When respondents answer affirmatively, it shows that they are having trouble getting enough food for their families in some way.

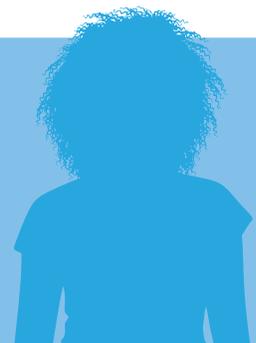
USDA Six-Item Short Form Food Security Scale



Food insecurity is indicated when respondents answer affirmatively to two or more items. Hunger is indicated when respondents answer affirmatively to five or more items.

"I had to quit my job so I could stay home with my children since their school is doing virtual. It has made it hard. We got a home based on dual income. Makes money for everything else very hard to come by."

—Spouse of active duty Coast Guard member

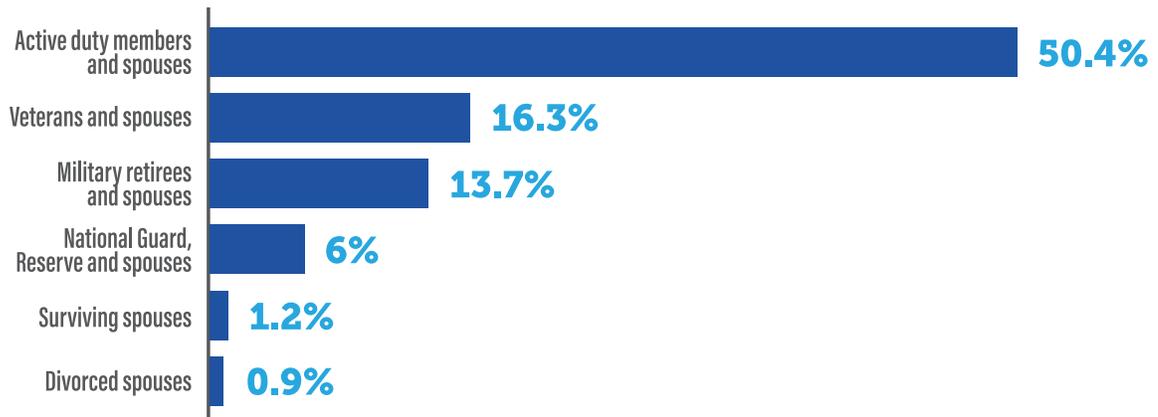




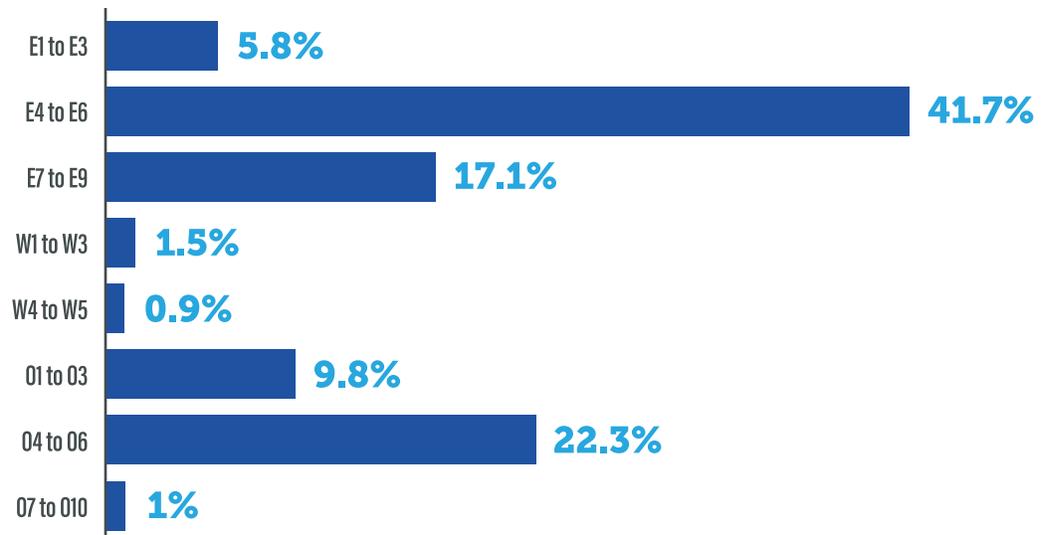
Demographics

All respondents were connected to military life.

The largest grouping of respondents was military spouses, and 75.4% of the survey respondents identified as female. The majority of veteran and military retiree families (57.8%) had served on active duty since 9/11.



Most respondents came from the enlisted ranks, specifically E4 to E6, as is also true of today's armed forces.



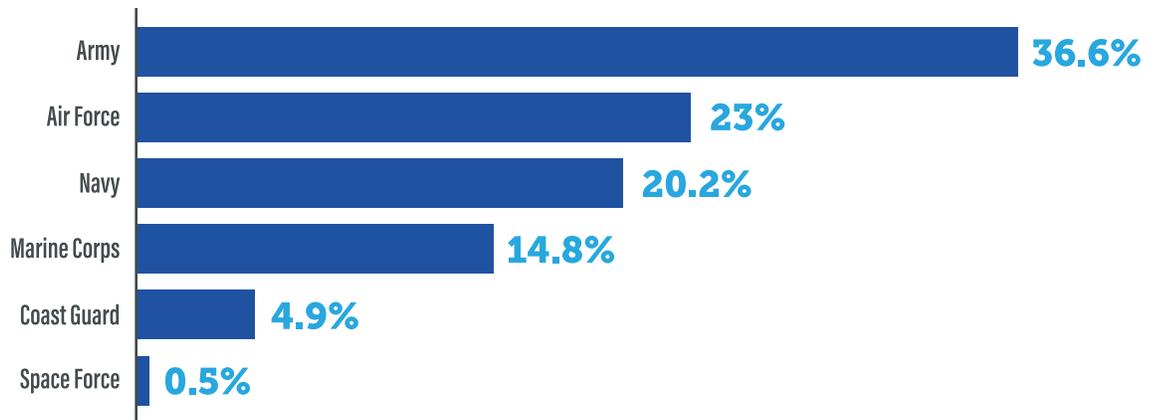


1 MILLION MEALS CHALLENGE

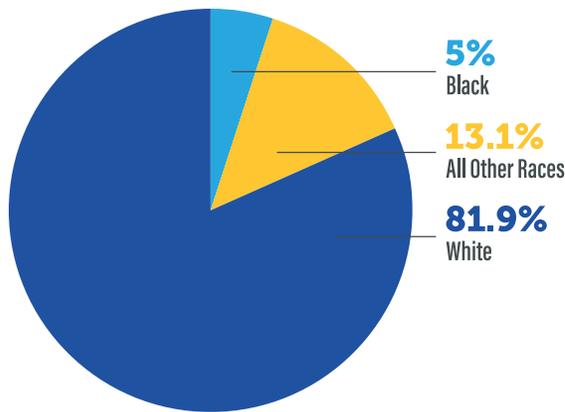


Military Family
Advisory Network

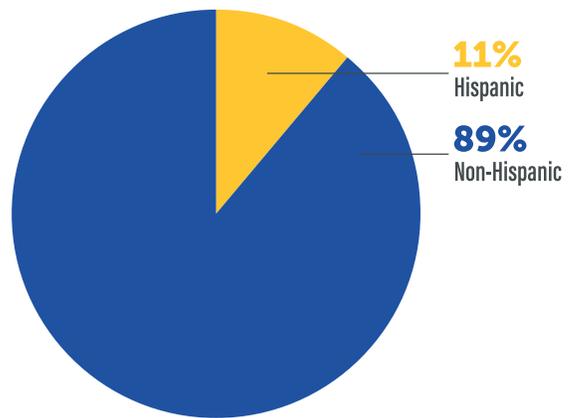
The proportion of respondents from each branch of service aligns with the currently serving force.



Race



Ethnicity



"E-4 pay grade with 3 kids. Money just is not enough. Especially on '3 week' pay periods. Not enough resources to help on those weeks we don't have enough for meals."

—Spouse of active duty Marine Corps member





Results

Comparison of data before and during the COVID-19 pandemic

USDA Six-Item Short Form Food Security Scale	Winter 2021 during COVID-19 pandemic	Fall 2019 before COVID-19 pandemic
Frequency of respondents experiencing food insecurity	1 in 5	1 in 8
Respondents experiencing hunger	10.5%	7.7%
Respondents experiencing low food security	9.1%	5%

Fall 2019 statistics are taken from MFAN's 2019 Military Family Support Programming Survey results.

Food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic

LESS LIKELY
to experience
food insecurity

COMMON FACTORS:

- E7 to E9 and Officer ranks
- Household size of 3 or fewer
- Not having children 18 years old or younger
- Attaining an associate degree or higher

MORE LIKELY
to experience
food insecurity

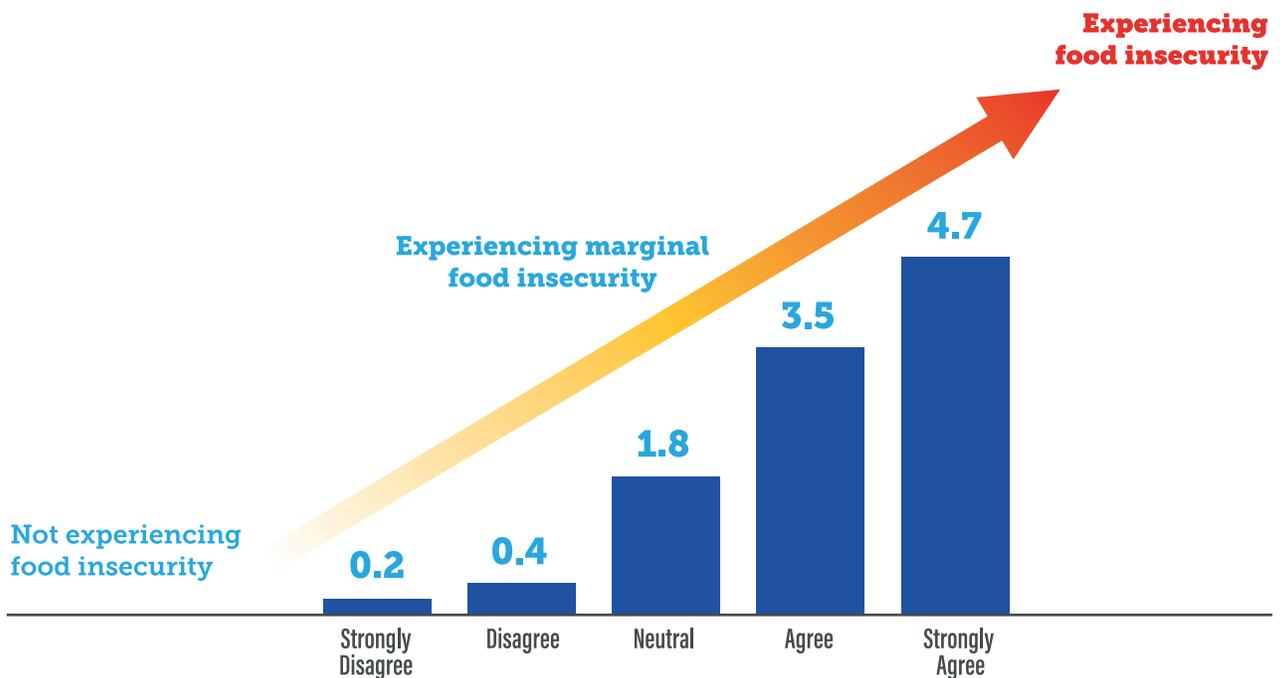
COMMON FACTORS:

- E1 to E6 ranks
- Household size of 4 or more
- Having children 18 years old or younger
- Attaining a technical, vocational, or high school diploma, or no degree



COVID-19's impact on food security

The pandemic increased the pressure for those facing food insecurity. There was a relationship between respondents' raw scores on the USDA Six-Item Short Form Food Security Scale and their agreement with the following statement: "COVID-19 has negatively impacted my ability to get enough food." Those who were experiencing more severe forms of food insecurity were more likely to strongly agree that the pandemic made it more difficult to get enough food.



"Not enough money. Not enough gas. The school is too far away to pick up meals daily. The state isn't helping. All 3 kids are virtual learning due to COVID. More meals each day means a larger grocery bill that most months we cannot afford."

—Spouse of Army veteran



Seeking assistance with food insecurity



When respondents did not have enough food for themselves or their families, nearly 30% said that they did not seek assistance. Those who did not seek assistance were more likely to be experiencing marginal or low food security.

Those experiencing hunger were more likely to say they sought support from community food bank/pantry (non-faith-based), family, and friends. Although there were fewer, some said they sought support through government programs like WIC (11.7%), Pandemic EBT (11.7%), and SNAP (7.7%).

Of those respondents who had accessed food resources in the past 12 months, their top 5 sources of assistance included:

Family	27.9%
Community food bank/pantry (non-faith-based)	25.5%
Free or reduced meals at school	24.5%
Friends	18.8%
Faith-based organization	14.1%

“Financially unable to stay afloat, between losing my job due to COVID and not making the money I was previously making, it put a toll on my financials.”

—Army National Guard/Reserve member





Top 5 reasons for difficulty in getting enough food

Among respondents experiencing marginal food security, low food security, or hunger, the following emerged as the top five reasons it has been difficult to get enough food during the COVID-19 pandemic:



1. Financial instability

Financial struggles included insufficient and recently cut incomes, a lack of money left over after bills at the end of the month, a lack of knowledge and ability around financial management and planning, and unexpected and unreimbursed moving expenses and debt.



2. Unexpected lifestyle changes

COVID-19 brought about struggles related to unemployment or lack of sufficient employment, added concern for fear of exposure and health risk, and increased food bills because children began schooling at home full time.



3. Difficulty accessing healthy food

Respondents experienced issues with food supply chain interruption, increased food pricing, and a lack of access to moderately priced and healthy foods.



4. Increased cost of living

Respondents reported a general increase in the cost of living that impacted their financial status.



5. Prepandemic challenges magnified

Food insecurity was compounded by existing conditions including disability, poor health, homelessness, single parenthood, unemployment, and a general lack of benefits and support.