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Study Provides Critical Insight into Well-Being of Military Families
Comprehensive research by the Military Family Advisory Network reveals concerning drop in military family respondents' inclination to recommend military service

WASHINGTON — Newly released data from the [Military Family Advisory Network (MFAN)](#) provides valuable insight into the lives of military and veteran families and the challenges that face them. More than 8,500 respondents' stories are captured in the 75-page report presented at a data release event in Washington, D.C. today.

The 2021 Military Family Support Programming Survey, presented by Oracle Cerner, introduces the Family Health Scale and provides an in-depth look into military families' relationships with finances, food security, health care, housing, family dynamics, transition, and more. The report will be used to inform, spotlight, and catalyze data-informed solutions where military families need them most.

"Prior research efforts have informed substantive changes in core areas such as housing and food insecurity," said Shannon Razsadin, MFAN's president and executive director. "This year, because of our lived experiences and those of families in our network, MFAN's research team added a newly implemented, validated well-being scale to our survey. This scale, coupled with the legacy question on recommendation of service, uncovered the connection between family well-being and proclivity to recommend military service — a troubling decline that should have everyone's attention."

The Military Family Support Programming Survey continues to complement other research efforts related to military-connected families. Through a mixed-method, highly qualitative approach, MFAN is able to learn from military families in their own words. All 8,638 responses were read and coded by two doctoral-level researchers, enabling the team to identify emerging themes that may have otherwise gone unnoticed.

The 2021 iteration of the survey was conducted from October to December 2021, providing key insights into pre- and post-pandemic experiences. Also, for the first time, MFAN included race and ethnicity demographic questions to identify core nuances in areas that span family well-being.

Key findings include:

There is a decrease in likelihood of recommending military service: a real concern for the future of the all-volunteer force. In 2021, 62.9% of military family respondents would recommend service, compared to 74.5% in 2019. Civilian respondents remain the same at 46%.

Respondents are having a hard time making ends meet. Over forty percent (44.0%) of currently serving families' combined household income is between $25,000 and $75,000 annually. Nearly 50% of currently serving respondents are experiencing a severe housing cost burden, meaning they are spending more than 50% of their income – including the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) – on housing and utility costs.

Major discrepancies exist in the well-being of enlisted versus officer families. Officer families experience excellent family well-being at more than double the rate of their enlisted family counterparts. This difference is even more severe when looking at marginalized populations, like Hispanic, Black, and multiracial families.

Food insecurity is a major issue, even before the inflation crisis. Nearly a fifth (18.4%) of currently serving families are experiencing food insecurity. Of which, 9.6% are experiencing hunger, meaning between five and six affirmative responses on the USDA Six-Item Short Form Food Security Scale. The locations where food insecurity is most prevalent remain the same from the 2019 study, which align with the food distribution events MFAN continues to host.

"MFAN is proud to have earned the trust of military families as well as those who are entrusted with their well-being," said Dr. Gabby L'Esperance, MFAN's director of research and program evaluation. "Elevating these experiences through a rigorous, qualitative method is paramount. As an organization guided by research, we will continue to seek deeper understanding of the families who serve so that we can collectively work to improve their experiences and the well-being of those who follow."

MFAN and partner organizations will convene on Friday to launch the next phase of MFAN's impact cycle at the 2022 Solutions Summit. During this event, participants will use the data collected from this survey to build frameworks for meaningful change.

The full report, executive summary, and data release video may be found here.

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About MFAN: The Military Family Advisory Network is the authentic voice of the modern military family and the bridge that connects military families to the resources, people, and information they depend on to successfully navigate all phases of military life. Learn more at mfan.org.

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