

THE BACKBONE OF OUR MILITARY



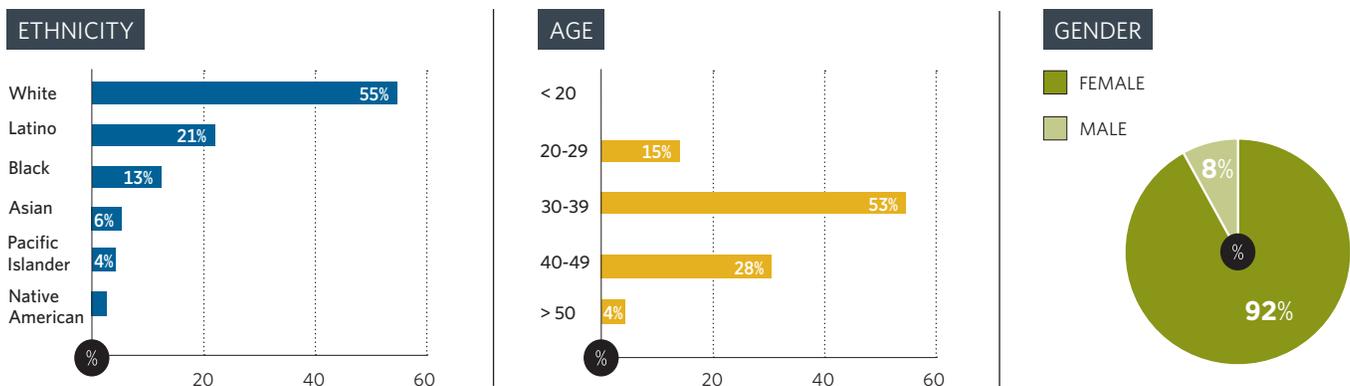
PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES FROM MODERN MILITARY SPOUSES

During the summer of 2018, the USO contracted a research team to delve into a population that has historically been viewed as monolithic: “the military spouse.” Many programs and services have been designed for a narrow image of spouses, and while well intentioned, this limited approach leaves many spouses well outside the reach of what could be impactful supportive services.

This research effort intended to develop a deep and multi-dimensional view of military spouses who vary in gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, geography, sexual orientation, family makeup, education, and more. Each possesses personal stories, experiences, and beliefs that influence his or her behavior and decision-making. All have needs, are faced with challenges, and hold preferences for their lives and the lives of their families. Through this research, organizations will be better able to communicate with, build programs around, and ultimately serve the military spouse community.

A SPOTLIGHT ON MILITARY SPOUSES

Graphics included here represent the demographic breakdown of the interview sample for this project. These data points may not be representative of the entire military spouse population as acknowledged within the annual DoD demographics report.



THEMES

The research team found three major themes around the shared needs of military spouses. The themes represent implicit conclusions gathered from all interviews.

Identity & Sense of Purpose

Consistently, military spouses reported feelings of loss, uncertain identity, or lack of purpose caused by the rigors of military life.

Trusted Networks & Support Systems

Military spouses often reported difficulty establishing and maintaining trusted networks and support systems, which negatively impact professional aspirations, social lives, and general satisfaction with military life.

Agency & the Ability to Plan

Many military spouses cited a lack of control over their own lives and an inability to plan for the future, primarily attributable to the atypical burdens placed on spouses by the military.

PERSPECTIVES

- Stereotypes associated with military spouses affect identity and behavior
- Expectations of military life often don't match reality
- Meaningful work can be difficult to find
- Trusted relationships are valued, but elusive
- Networks are difficult to maintain
- Well-intentioned services break down in execution
- Frequent transitions present major challenges
- Childcare is a critical issue
- Planning for the future is challenging

OPPORTUNITIES

For any organization that wishes to further engage and support military spouses, there are a number of opportunities worthy of exploration based on the initial findings of this research project. The opportunities below are not presented in order of priority or preference.

- Celebrate Working Military Spouses
- Develop Social and Professional Networks
- Establish Childcare Training Programs
- Create a Spouse Life Coaching Program

PERSONAS OF MILITARY SPOUSES

Personas are tools that can help teams build empathy for customers by understanding the needs and behaviors of others. They help teams think through interacting with a service offering through the eyes of a customer.

“**Proudly Serving**” military spouses live and breathe military life. They know the lingo and military protocol. They believe their supportive role is a special one and feel eager to serve in their own way.



“We’re very adaptable. We can flourish, but not always. And we’re constantly bending and molding ourselves.”

“**My Dreams, My Path**” feel attached to the trajectory they had prior to marrying a military service member. The fact that they got married has no impact on their visions or expectations of pursuing their lives’ goals and dreams.



“Don’t label me as a military spouse; I hate being called that.”

For “**Making Ends Meet**”, the military provides all of the basic needs they struggled to obtain in life before marrying into the military, and for this they are grateful. This can be particularly challenging in higher cost of living areas.



“Milpay versus what it costs to live in that city; they never match up for enlisted.”

Those who are “**Searching for My Tribe**” are aware that they don’t look like most other military spouses—that is, women with husbands and children.



“[It’s] a little harder as a male. The women have their cliques and all three of us men have our clique.”