



NATIONAL
MILITARY FAMILY
ASSOCIATION

2022 YOUNG ADULT REPORT

INTRODUCTION

While fielding our 2022 Military Teen Experience survey, the National Military Family Association (NMFA) received many responses from military-connected young adults ages 18-24. While their responses were not included in the report on the Teen Experience survey results, we recognize that individuals in this age cohort have also been impacted by their parents' military service. This report provides details about the lives and unique challenges facing the young adult children of service members, military retirees, and veterans.

METHODS

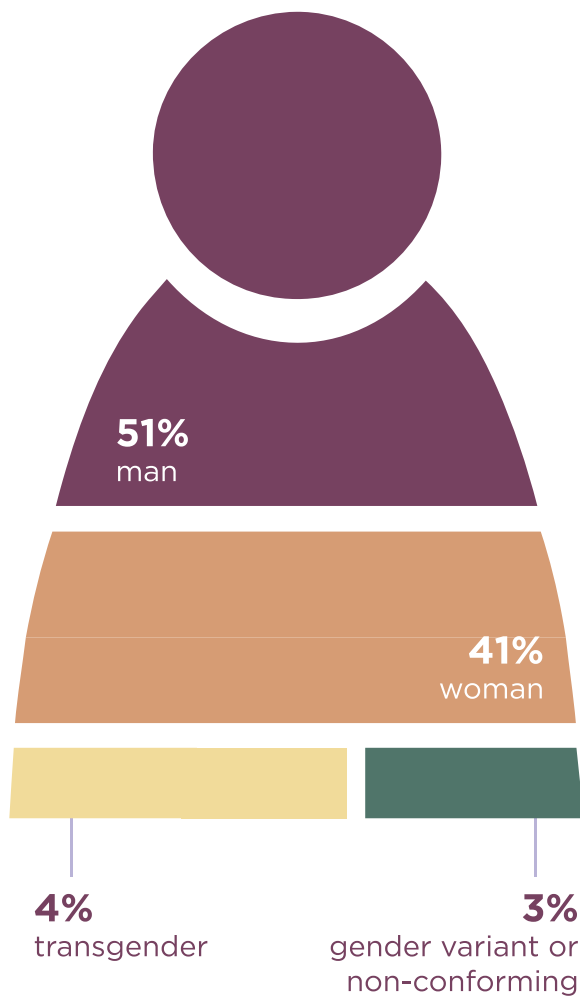
NMFA and Bloom's Military Teen Experience survey collected data from military teens and young adults. For this report, only data from young adults were described. This report uses data to describe characteristics of the military young adult population, including parent's military characteristics (e.g., parent's rank), young adult's demographic characteristics (e.g., age), and young adult's current experiences (e.g., mental well-being, food insecurity, voting status). For specific information regarding the methods and measures used in the 2022 Military Teen Experience survey, please refer to the complete 2022 Military Teen Experience Report [here](#).

SAMPLE

NMFA and Bloom fielded the Military Teen Experience survey for military-connected teens and young adults between the ages of 13-24 years old in February of 2022, for a two-week time frame. During this time, NMFA received over 2,500 (N = 2,667) responses, with 867 respondents being military-connected young adults between the ages of 18-24.

FINDINGS

DEMOGRAPHICS



Young adults primarily identified as:

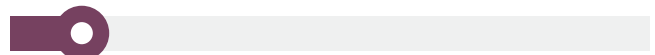
70% White or Caucasian



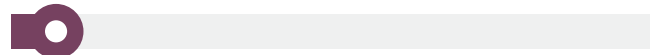
13% Black or African American



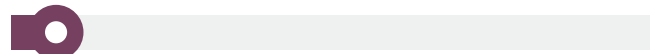
6% Asian or Asian American



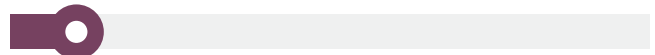
2% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander



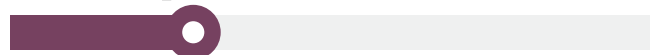
2% American Indian or Alaskan Native



5% two or more races



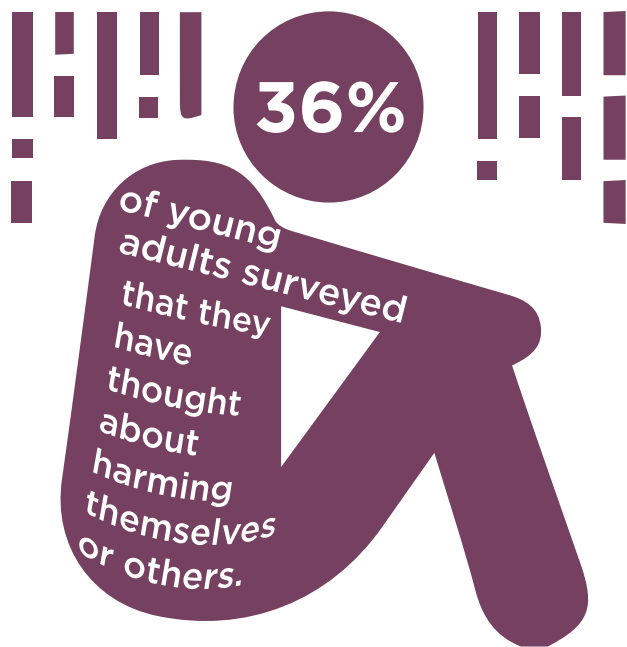
29% Hispanic or Latino/a/e



Young adult respondents were mostly from actively serving families (40%) or families of retired service members who were either medically retired or who had served 20 years or more (27%).

MENTAL WELL-BEING

In 2022, the majority (58%) of young adult respondents indicated a moderate level of mental well-being. An additional 30% of young adult respondents reported low mental well-being. Only 10% of military young adult respondents reported high mental well-being.



This statistic is mirrored in the military teen respondents, 37% of whom also shared the same thoughts. Unsurprisingly, lower mental well-being was related to young adults being more likely to report experiencing thoughts of harming themselves or others. When asked if they were able to get the help they needed, 20% of young adults said they were able to obtain care for their mental health concerns in the past year. TRICARE policies may present a barrier to young adult dependents of service members from receiving needed mental health care. Under the Affordable Care Act, commercial health insurers

are required to automatically cover young adult dependents under their parents' plans up to age 26. However, TRICARE is exempt from this requirement. Instead, TRICARE only covers young dependents up to age 21, or age 23 if enrolled in college.

Military families who want their young adult children to retain TRICARE coverage must purchase a separate premium-based plan, TRICARE Young Adult. This creates a financial burden on young adult dependents and their parents because, under law, TRICARE Young Adult must operate at no cost to the government, causing enrollees and their families to bear the entire cost. From 2020 to 2021, the monthly premium for TRICARE Young Adult Prime increased by more than 20 percent to over \$450 per month (NMFA, 2021). NMFA has advocated to extend TRICARE coverage to young adult dependents up to age 26, in line with the Affordable Care Act.

In Their Own Words:

“The toll that physical and mental health has taken on myself and my family, as well as the struggle of moving every so often and changing schools (abandonment issues).”

– Retired Air Force (unsure of rank) young adult, age 20, college student

“When I was in middle school, I wish I had an adult (like a therapist) to kind of validate the way I was feeling.”

– Active-duty Army (O-6) young adult, age 19, college student



“The biggest struggle I have faced as a military teen that I wish others understood is that we have had to grow up really fast. When my Dad is deployed, my Mom still has to work and it was hard being 9 and having to help take care of my little brother. Having a parent deployed also causes a lot of anxiety, which causes other health issues when not treated properly. When my dad was deployed, I always had severe nausea and could not eat and no military provider even thought that anxiety surrounding my Dad being in Afghanistan would be the issue. I wish more people understood how hard it is to be a child worrying about their parent dying as that is all we really see on the news.”

– Active-duty Army (O-6) young adult, age 21, college student

FOOD INSECURITY

No military family should struggle to put food on their table, but far too many do. Food distribution sites operate on or near virtually every military installation, and the demand has only increased since the COVID-19 pandemic (Military Family Advisory Network, 2021). To learn more about military-connected teens' and young adults' experience with food insecurity, we included questions from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Security Survey in our Military Teen Experience survey.

A third of the young adult respondents (32%) reported being food secure (i.e., one or no reported indicators of concerns about food, typical anxiety over food sufficiency or shortage of food in the home).



Specifically, 23% were experiencing low food security (i.e., reported indicators of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of food) and 42% of respondents were experiencing very low food security (i.e., multiple reported indicators of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake).

Additionally, 13% of respondents told us they had a job and were working to contribute to their family's finances, rather than for extra spending money or for professional experience. These young adults are working to help their family out. Moreover, young adults who reported experiencing greater food insecurity generally reported lower mental well-being. Previous research has demonstrated a link between food insecurity

and negative outcomes for young adults, including depression, making this connection unsurprising (Ke & Ford-Jones, 2015; McIntyre et al., 2013).

WORK AND SCHOOL

We asked young adults about their chosen path after leaving high school or, if they were still in high school, what their plans were for the future. The majority (73%) of young adults were enrolled in some type of two- or four- year college while 9% were enrolled in a graduate program. Some chose to work full- or part-time rather than pursuing postsecondary education (7%). Regardless of being in school, 49% of young adults reported holding jobs. Out of young adults who held a job, 37% did so for personal spending, 25% did so for work experience, and 12% for a reason not listed.



26% of military-connected young adults reported working to help with family finances

In Their Own Words:

“My biggest struggle as a military teen was finding the resources to help me pursue college. Understanding how to handle my finances with military aid. Also, knowing how to live life beyond the military base gates—it’s like I’m culture shocked of my own country, America, now that I attend university.”

– Retired Army (E-8) young adult, age 18, college student

“It made it very hard to choose a college because I felt like I was overwhelmed by the choices and where to go. Should I go by family, should I go far away? Do I even still like that part of the country (because I was so young when I lived there)? So many questions it was almost too many choices! I guess that’s a good problem to have?”

– Active-duty Army (E-6) young adult, age 19, college student

VOTING

Of the young adult respondents, the overwhelming majority (73%) shared they are currently registered to vote. Over half (57%) of respondents that shared they were registered to vote and were old enough to vote in previous elections reported they had voted in a previous election.



83% said they plan to vote in future elections

Voting is a fundamental right for all Americans, but for many military family members, this can be complicated. The process is often foreign to first-time voters, including many military family young adults, but complications of military life make it even less clear. Military family voters are often unsure where and how to vote, or even register to vote, due to frequent relocations, overseas assignments, and uncertain futures.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Advocating for TRICARE Young Adult to cover young dependents up to age 26 like commercial health insurers, instead of only until age 21, or age 23 if enrolled in college
- Call on Congress and Department of Defense to increase reimbursement rates as needed to encourage more mental and behavioral health providers to accept TRICARE.
- Revise the rules around Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) so that Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) is excluded from eligibility calculations, allowing for military families to more easily address food insecurity.