

# **2023 Military Teen Experience Survey: Highlights**

## About the Military Teen Experience Survey

In 2021, NMFA and Bloom: Empowering the Military Teen (Bloom), now a program of NMFA, launched the annual Military Teen Experience Survey (MTES). The survey provides valuable insight into a previously understudied group: military-connected teens and young adults. Now in its third year, the MTES continues to explore the overall experience of our military-connected adolescents allowing NMFA to continue research-driven advocacy and programs that get to the heart of what military families need to survive.

The survey covers mental health, food security, future career plans, and propensity to serve in the uniformed services while examining the importance of peer connections and sports and extracurriculars in military-connected teens' lives.

We now have an increasingly comprehensive understanding of the unique challenges of military-connected youth, including their mental health, food security, and general experiences.



# Demographics

## Sample Size

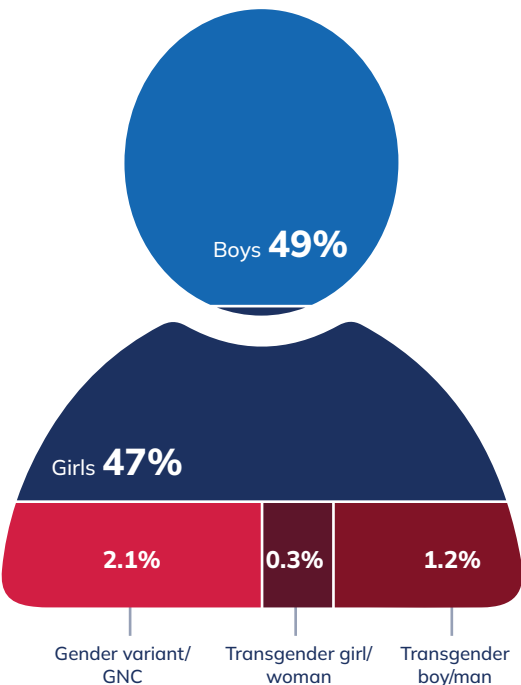
1,858

## Age

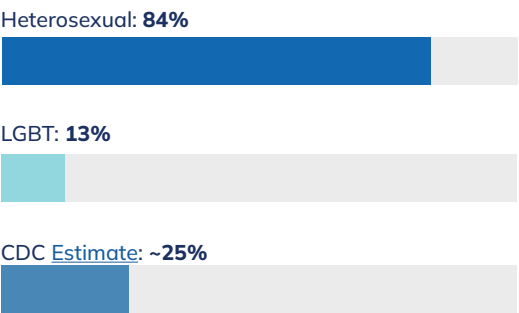
Teens  
1,021

Young Adults  
837

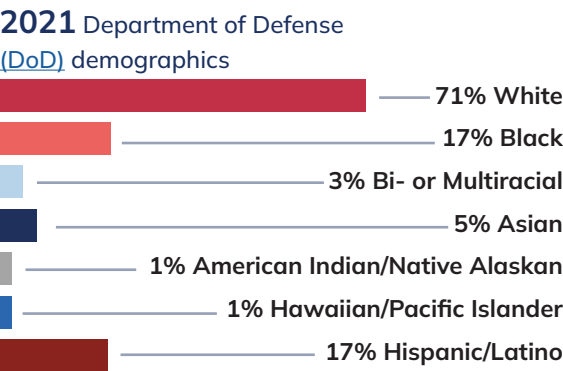
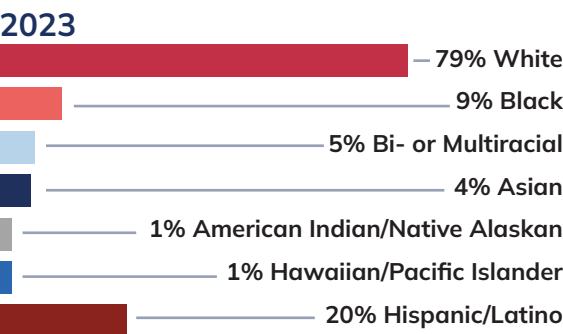
## Gender



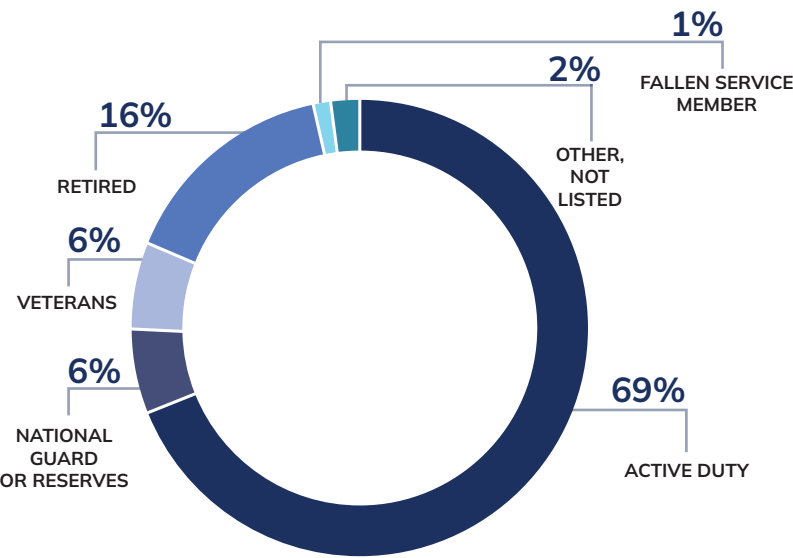
## Sexual Orientation



## Race and Ethnicity



## Military Status of Serving Parent



## Dual Military - Active Duty

44%

## Dual Military - No longer serving

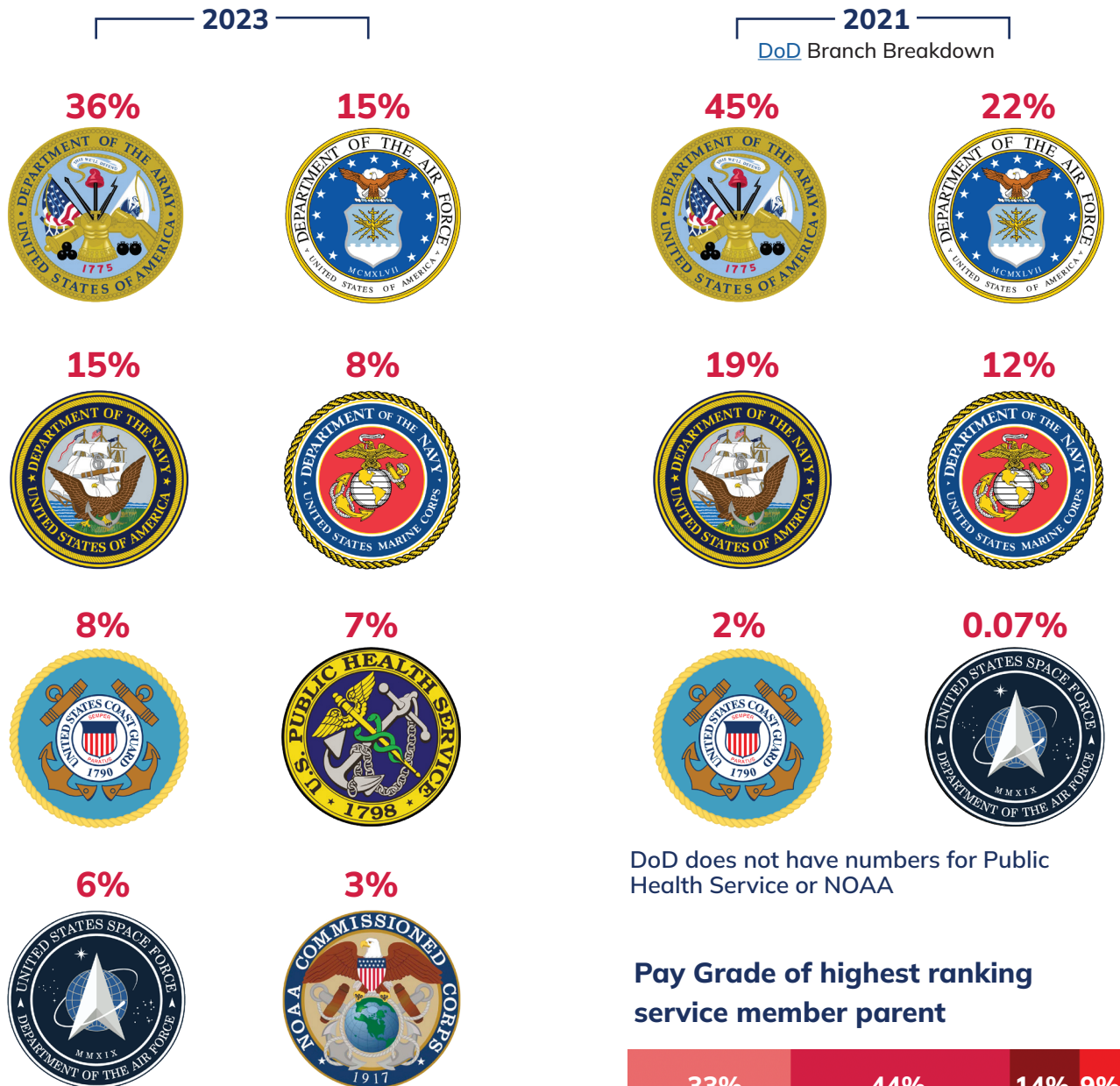
22%

## Respondent Currently Serving

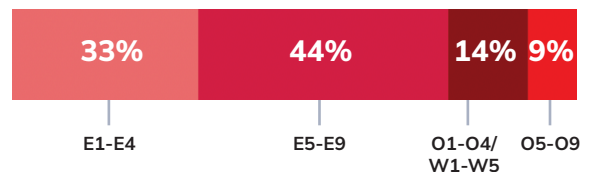
1%



## Service Member Demographics



### Pay Grade of highest ranking service member parent



### Wounded, Ill, or Injured Service Member

**77%**

Invisible	46%
Visible	18%
Both	13%



Average Number of Deployments: 2

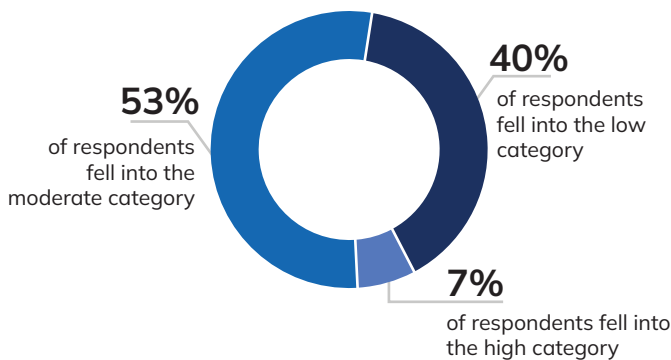
Average Number of PCS/Military Moves: 4



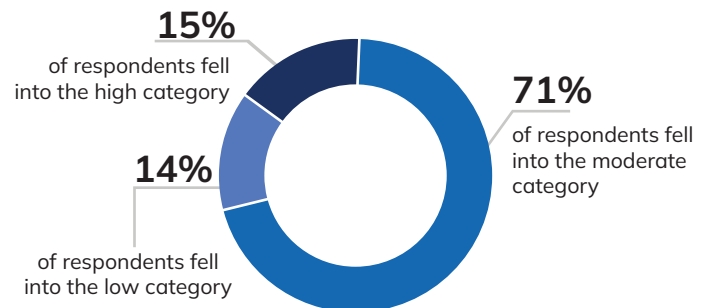
Average Number of School Changes: 5

## Mental Health

### Mental Well-being:



### population [study](#) comparison:



## Gender Differences

**Girls are 1.5x more likely to be classified with low mental well-being than boys, and 1.3x more likely to be classified with moderate well-being.**

### Wounded, Ill, or Injured (WII) Service Members

Respondents with a WII service member parent or guardian (of any kind) were 2.5x more likely to report low mental well-being compared to respondents without a WII service member in the household.

Respondents with a service member with a visible wound were significantly more likely to report high and moderate well-being compared to those with a service member with an invisible wound.

### Suicidal Ideation (SI)

MTES Full Sample (SI): 11%

CDC [Estimate](#) Ages 16-24: 26%

### Self-Harm (SH)

64% of respondents have never thought of harming themselves.

74% of respondents have never actually harmed themselves.

## Seeking Mental Healthcare

**85% of respondents reported they got the mental healthcare they needed.**

Nearly half of respondents sought care for their concerns (44%) and 41% reported they did not need mental healthcare. Only 8% reported not getting the care they needed because they didn't tell their parents, and nearly 5% did not receive needed mental healthcare because their parents were unwilling or unable to help them get care.



## In the Past 12 Months Have You Sought Care for a Mental or Behavioral Health Concern?

Response	Percent %	Total (n)
Yes	44	705
No - Not needed	41	659
No - Did not disclose to parents	8	133
No - Parents unable to find care	2	35
No - Parents unwilling to find care	3	40

Note: These numbers exclude those that responded "Prefer not to answer" (n = 30).





## Food Security

MTES Full Sample: 51% food insecure  
USDA 2020 [Estimate](#): 10% food insecure



High Food Security



Low Food Security



Very Low Food Security

### Food Security and Mental Well-being

**Higher food insecurity is related to worse mental well-being.**

#### Food Security and Wounded, Ill, and Injured Service Members

Respondents with a wounded, ill, or injured service member were significantly more likely to report food insecurity. Respondents with a service member with both visible and invisible WII had the greatest level of food insecurity.



## Hidden Helpers

77% of respondents are Hidden Helpers.

### Wounded, Ill, or Injured Service Member Breakdown

Injury Type	Percent %	Total (n)
None	24	381
Invisible	46	743
Visible	18	291
Both	13	205



#### Hidden Helpers and Mental Well-being

Respondents with a WII service member or veteran (of any kind) were 2.5x more likely to report low mental well-being compared to respondents without a WII service member.



Respondents with a service member with a **visible** wound were significantly more likely to report high and moderate well-being compared to those with a service member with an invisible wound.



#### Hidden Helpers and Suicidal Ideation

1 in 4 hidden helpers with a visibly wounded service member or a service member with both types of injuries reported passive SI in the past month.



**70%** of respondents with a service member with an invisible wound reported preparing to end their life at some time in their lifetime.

Population rates of SI = 26%

MTES lifetime SI = 38%



### Hidden Helpers and Self-Harm

Respondents with a service member with a WII of any kind were 1.4x more likely to report thoughts of SH and nearly 3x more likely to report actually harming themselves compared to their peers without a WII service member or veteran.

Respondents with a service member who have both an invisible and a visible wound were 1.5x more likely to report thoughts of SH, compared to their peers with a non-WII service member. Respondents with a visibly wounded service member were 1.8x more likely to report SH behavior, and respondents with a service member with both types of wounds were 1.6x more likely to report SH behavior, compared to their peers without a WII service member.

### Access to Mental Healthcare and Service Member WII

Injury Type	% Got Help Needed	% Did Not Get Help Needed	Total (n)
None	82	15	381
Invisible	91	9	725
Visible	80	18	283
Both	82	16	192

Note: These numbers exclude those that responded “Prefer not to answer”.

### Hidden Helpers and Food Security

Food security was lowest among hidden helpers with a visibly injured service member, with nearly 40% reporting very low food security, compared to 5% of respondents without a WII service member.

Having a WII service member (of any kind) significantly increased the likelihood of reporting food insecurity compared to peers with a non-WII service member.



Food Security and Service Member WII

Injury Type	% Food Secure	% Food Insecure	Total (n)
None	83	17	381
Invisible	37	63	743
Visible	30	70	291
Both	48	52	205

Note: These numbers exclude those that responded “Prefer not to answer” (n = 18).

Likelihood of Reporting Food Insecurity Based on Service Member WII (Most to Least)









# Propensity and Work







MTES Full Sample: 32%  
Recent DoD [Estimate](#) Ages 16-24: 9%

**How They Plan to Join**  
67% plan to join after receiving a college education  
26% plan to enlist

## Top Three Reasons to Join

Teens	Young Adult
 To pay for future education	 To help others
 Gain work experience/skills	 Gain work experience/skills
 Health/medical benefits	 Health/medical benefits

## Top Three Reasons Not to Join

Teens	Young Adult
 Other career interests	 Don't believe I would qualify
 Dislike of military lifestyle	 Other career interests AND Possibility of physical injury/death
 Don't believe I would qualify	 Dislike of military lifestyle

## Gender Differences in Propensity







Boys: 43%

Girls: 43%





Top Three Reasons to Join

Girls	Boys
 To pay for future education	 To help others
 Health/medical benefits	 Gain work experience/skills
 To help others	 Health/medical benefits

Top Three Reasons Not to Join

Girls and Boys		
 Other career interests	 Dislike of military lifestyle	 Don't believe I would qualify

Propensity and Connection to Military Life

Lowest: Respondents with an active-duty parent or guardian (22%)

Highest: Respondents with a National Guard or Reserve parent or guardian (65%)

Propensity and Pay Grade

Lowest: Respondents with an O4-O9 parent or guardian (20%)

Highest: Respondents with an E1-E4 parent or guardian (71%)

Propensity and WII Service Member

Lowest: Respondents with a non-WII service member (27%)

Highest: Respondents with a parent or guardian with a visible injury (52%)

## Peer Connections

77% of respondents felt that their friends made them feel good about themselves.

90% of respondents were confident in their ability to make and keep friends.

Respondents with more positive friendships reported better mental well-being than those with fewer positive friendships.

Respondents who were more confident in their friendship abilities reported better mental well-being than those who were less confident.

### Ranking Social Media Platforms Where They Connect with Other Military Teens



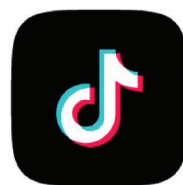
746



716



657



459



454



391



289



252



183



155



## Sports and Extracurriculars

### Participation and Positive Perception

Sport/Activity	% Participation	Total (n)	% Positive Impact	Total (n)
Team Sports	81	1325	81	1075
Individual Sports	71	1169	78	915
Team/Group Activities	80	1328	79	1043
Individual Activities	78	1277	77	980

### Main Reason for Not Participating

Across all activities the main reason for not participating in sports and extracurriculars was lack of interest.

**Most participants did not feel their access to sports and activities were limited due to their military connection.**

Military lifestyle and/or military child status were not a top reason for non-participation.

Participation in individual activities outside of sports was more affected by the military lifestyle than sports or team/group activities - lack of interest was still the main reason for not participating.







# **National Military Family Association**

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