



# **2023 Military Teen Experience Survey: Introduction and Methods**



## About NMFA

The National Military Family Association is the leading nonprofit dedicated to serving military families around the world. Since 1969, NMFA has worked to strengthen and protect millions of families through innovative advocacy and effective programming. They provide spouse scholarships, camps for military kids, and retreats for families reconnecting after deployment and for families of the wounded, ill, or injured. NMFA serves the families of the currently serving, veteran, retired, wounded or fallen members of the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, Space Force, Coast Guard, and Commissioned Corps of the USPHS and NOAA. To get involved and learn more, visit [www.MilitaryFamily.org](http://www.MilitaryFamily.org).

## About Bloom

Bloom: Empowering the Military Teen is an organization created by and for military teens to empower, highlight, and connect military teens across the globe. Founded by two teens who were struggling with a difficult move, its purpose is to ensure that military teens know they are not alone. Bloom is one of the only organizations that focuses specifically on military dependents of middle school, high school, and college age. Since its launch in April 2020, Bloom has published over 185 articles and featured the work of over 30 military teens from 14 states and five countries as part of its commitment to sharing the stories and presenting the authentic experiences of the military child. To learn more about Bloom, visit [www.bloommilitaryteens.org](http://www.bloommilitaryteens.org).



## Introduction

In 2021, we fielded our first-ever Military Teen Experience Survey (MTES) and over 2,000 military-connected youth, ages 13-19, responded. In 2022, we received even more responses, with over 2,500 teens and young adults, ages 13-24, sharing their experiences. This year, nearly 2,000 (n = 1,858) military youth responded. We now have an increasingly comprehensive understanding of the unique challenges of military-connected youth, including their mental health, food security, and general experiences.

This report details the methodology of our third annual MTES. The world is still adjusting in the wake of the pandemic and we were eager to see how our military teens are doing. Below is a comprehensive list of this year's reports.

[Demographics](#)

[Food Security](#)

[Hidden Helpers](#)

[Mental Health](#)

[Peer Connections](#)

[Propensity and Work](#)

[Sports and Extracurriculars](#)





## Method

The MTES is a mixed-method cross-sectional study. As with previous years, we utilized both quantitative (numerical) and qualitative (descriptive) measures to capture a detailed, comprehensive picture of the experiences of our military-connected youth. This is a cross-sectional design; we examined a sample from the wider military youth population at a single point in time to understand and characterize their similarities, differences, and overall experiences. We can't draw conclusions about causation from cross-sectional designs, but we can make comparisons across groups and analyze trends in responses.

We collaborated again with Bloom: Empowering the Military Teen to disseminate the survey. Respondents were recruited through their parents or guardians via email, social media, and web-based marketing. The survey contained 73 total questions and took an estimated 11 minutes to complete. Skip logic was used to ensure respondents only received questions that were relevant to them. The survey targeted the overall experience of our military youth, including mental health, food security, peer connections, future career plans, and sports and extracurricular participation. Anonymity was assured, and all identifying markers were scrubbed from the data prior to analysis.



## Measures

For the third year we used the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (SWEMWBS) and the Self-Administered Food Security Survey Module for Youth Ages 12 And Older (developed and validated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA]). To dig deeper into our previous findings surrounding suicide and self-harm, The Columbia Protocol, also known as the Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale (C-SSRS), was a new addition for this year.

The SWEMWBS is a validated, 7-item scale which measures the well-being and psychological functioning of youth. This instrument captures a wide concept of well-being, including emotional, cognitive, and psychological components. Mental well-being is a broad construct that involves life satisfaction, happiness, and overall positive functioning. NMFA is licensed to deliver this measure for non-commercial purposes.

The C-SSRS is a validated, 6-item scale used to screen for suicidal ideation. The Centers for Disease Control define suicidal ideation as “thinking about, considering, or planning suicide”. This instrument assesses suicidal ideation, preparations for suicide, and suicide attempts. You can learn more about these measures in the dedicated mental wellbeing report here.

[www.militaryfamily.org/wp-content/uploads/2023-MTES-Mental-Health.pdf](http://www.militaryfamily.org/wp-content/uploads/2023-MTES-Mental-Health.pdf)

The USDA Food Security Survey Module for Youth Ages 12 and Older was used to measure the food security of our military teens. This measure assesses household access to food and eating patterns over the past 30-days. You can learn more about food insecurity in the dedicated report

[www.militaryfamily.org/wp-content/uploads/2023-MTES-Food-Security.pdf](http://www.militaryfamily.org/wp-content/uploads/2023-MTES-Food-Security.pdf)





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2800 Eisenhower Avenue, Suite 250,  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
703.931.6632 | [MilitaryFamily.org](http://MilitaryFamily.org)

