
Summary of Findings: Military Family Needs Assessment

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This report has been developed as part of a partnership between the Office of the Secretary of Defense's Military Community & Family Policy Office, the US Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University's Department of Human Development.

August 2010

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Introduction

The number of military service members and families impacted by the Global War on Terrorism is significant. According to the Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (2008), more than half (55%) of active military members are married and about 43% have children (42% of whom are under the age of 5 years). About 1.5 million service members have spent service time in Iraq; about 500,000 have served two tours of combat; 70,000 have served three, and 20,000 have been deployed five or more times (Olson, 2007). Given that deployment tours can last up to 15 months, many military personnel have been spending more time overseas than at home. Of particular note for professionals involved with family support programming for military families, is that there are over one million citizen-soldier members of the National Guard and the Reserves of the military branches. More than half of them are married and more than 4 in 10 have children under the age of 5 years (Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense). At one point in 2004, 48% of the soldiers serving in the Middle East were members of the National Guard or the Reserves.

The forward deployment of service members to active war zones, which involves the issues of separation, time away from home, and eventual reunion, increases the vulnerability of their families to multiple negative short-term and long-term effects that have been well documented (e.g. Chandra et al., 2008; Gibbs et al., 2007; Huebner et al., 2007; Huebner et al., 2009; Karney & Crown, 2007). Recognizing the family-level difficulties associated with military service, the U.S. Military has assembled an impressive human service delivery system designed to support families and thus lower their chances of experiencing problems and dysfunction. In fact, the U.S. Military has partnered with non-military organizations to improve access to such supports. Despite the wide array of services however, few if any studies have attempted to explore what educational programs, support networks and services are actually being used, what conditions facilitate or inhibit use, and what supports or delivery methods are missing for the youth and families of military service members.

Studies that have been conducted have focused primarily on the experience of service members themselves. Additionally, these studies have primarily focused on the utilization of mental health services specifically, rather than on an overall array of support services (which also include mental health). Johnson et al. (2007) reviewed both empirical and non-empirical studies (e.g. media reports, informal user surveys, and lessons learned from military psychologists) that examined the impact of deployment on service members' mental health and on service members' need for services both during and after deployment. Through this process, Johnson et al. (2007) identified potential barriers that exist which inhibit service members from accessing mental health services. These barriers tended to group into three categories: (1) *availability* (i.e. shortage of behavioral health professionals, lack of military culture training for behavioral health professionals, and lack of qualified personnel to treat the military population in the civilian community), (2) *acceptability* (i.e.

stigma, career being negatively affected, lack of confidentiality, rank in the military, perception of poor quality services, and poor reception in the Chain of Command), and (3) *accessibility* (i.e. difficulty scheduling appointments, overlapping hours with workdays, lack of follow-through after being referred, and lack of transportation). Moreover, in multiple quantitative studies, fear of stigmatization has by far been the highest reported barrier to seeking services by service members (Hoge et al., 2004; Milliken et al., 2007).

There appears to be a significant relationship between diagnosis and/or hospitalization for a mental health disorder and the attrition rates of service members. For example, Hoge et al. (2005) reported that mental health disorders account for 8% of involuntary separations of service members, whereas the presence of other conditions account for less than 1% of involuntary separations. Additional findings revealed that 45% of service members hospitalized with a mental health disorder after returning from deployment left the service within six months; only 11% of service members hospitalized for other medical issues after returning from deployment left the service within the same time frame. Of the service members that were hospitalized for a mental health disorder, 17% were involuntarily discharged. The study indicated that the service members were found to “not be conducive for service” because the disorder was still present after treatment or counseling (Hoge et al., 2005, p. 589).

In sum, current studies have tended to focus on military service members themselves and on the utilization of mental health services. Few studies have broadened the focus to include military family members and the experience of seeking support services in general. This omission is unfortunate given the important role that families play in decisions about re-enlistment (e.g. Weiss et al., 2002) and in treatment-seeking and compliance (e.g. Pescosolido & Boyer, 1999).

The present study, entitled the Military Family Needs Assessment (MFNA), was designed to fill this gap. At the direction of the Office of the Secretary of Defense's Military Community & Family Policy Office, and in partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture, researchers at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University gathered feedback from both service members and family members who *have* accessed various educational programs and support services, as well as from those who *have not*. The goal of the project was to hear directly from the consumers about what is working and what is not in the arena of family education and support. It is hoped that this information can be used to provide guidance for policy makers and service providers in the development and refinement of educational programs, support networks and services, and their delivery in ways that better support service members and their families. In turn, it is anticipated that such program enhancements will improve quality of life and overall adjustment to deployment and reintegration, thus improving overall family and service member readiness.

Methodology

Participants

Participants in this study included military service members and their families, most of whom had experienced deployment. Only adults aged 18 and above were recruited. Every branch of the military was represented, including Active Duty, National Guard, and Reserve. Online participants were from locations throughout the country, while focus group data was collected in person from an installation in the South, an installation in the Mid-Atlantic, and several OCONUS installations. The study included 578 online participants and 108 participants who took part in the study via focus groups.

The online participants ranged in age from 19 to 65 years and reported as 56.9% females, 40.7% males, and 2.4% as unreported. Military service branch representation of the online participants included 12.6% Army, 2.1% Navy, 65.4% Air Force, 7.1% Marines, 8.6% National Guard/Reserve, 0.5% Joint Command, and 3.6% who did not report. Online participants included 48.1% service members, 43.8% spouses of service members, 5% who were both a service member AND spouse of a service member, and 3.1% who did not report. Online participant ethnicity was reported as 75.4% Caucasian/White, 6.4% African American, 6.9% Hispanic, 1.7% Asian/Pacific Islander, 4.3% "Other", and 5.2% as unreported. It is important to note that the online survey was ended earlier than anticipated, preventing additional respondents. Air Force was able to heavily promote the survey prior to its closing, accounting for the large number of responses from Air Force.

The focus group participants ranged in age from 19 to 54 years and reported as 70.4% females and 29.6% males. Military service branch representation in the focus groups included 25% Army, 28.7% Navy, 9.3% Air Force, 16.7% Marines, 19.5% National Guard/Reserve, and 0.9% who did not report. Focus group participants included 29.6% service members, 64.8% spouses of service members, 4.6% who were both a service member AND spouse of a service member, and 0.9% who did not report. Ethnicity of the focus group participants was reported as 57.4% Caucasian/White, 17.6% African American, 10.2% Hispanic, 11.1% Asian/Pacific Islander, 2.8% "Other", and 0.9% as unreported.

Participants were recruited for online participation via a link on Military OneSource's homepage, a popular military support website (<http://www.militaryonesource.com/>). Based on geographic and service affiliation diversity, specific installations were invited by representatives of the Office of the Secretary of Defense to host focus groups. At the installation level, focus group participants were recruited via word of mouth between military liaisons and on-base support services, such as Family Readiness Officers and Ombudsman, who were then able to dispatch information about the study to service members and/or their families. Study methods were evaluated and approved by the

Institutional Review Board (human subjects) at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (See Appendix). Each participant provided informed consent prior to participation and was made aware that they could withdraw at any time during the online survey or focus group discussions without risk or penalty.

Procedure and Data Analyses

The study employed two forms of data collection, the content of which was identical. The first form involved an online survey. A link to the survey was posted on Military OneSource's home page so that anyone interested in taking part in the study could voluntarily do so. The online survey consisted of twelve open-ended questions for which participants could type answers in an essay-style format (see Appendix). The online survey also asked fourteen multiple choice and short-answer questions regarding the demographics of the individual taking the survey.

The second form of data collection employed was that of focus groups or, as they were often referred to, "listening sessions". The listening sessions were approximately 45 minutes to an hour in length, included an average of eight participants, and were audio recorded to ensure that all of the information provided by the participants was collected in its entirety for later analyses. Questions asked in the listening session were the same as those posed in the on-line version (see Appendix B).

Given the nature of the listening sessions, the researchers were able to probe as necessary to gain richer descriptions of the participants' experiences. When all of the questions had been discussed and/or the listening session had reached its allotted time, the audio recorder was stopped and the listening session was concluded.

Throughout the process, the researchers considered and discussed how close they were to reaching saturation with respect to the data being gathered. Upon saturation, the audio recordings were transcribed and coded, while all demographic data were entered into SPSS electronic database. To protect anonymity, participants' names were replaced by code numbers during the transcription and data entry process. Participant information, corresponding code numbers, and all electronic data were saved on password protected computer hard drives that only the research team could access. Likewise, hard copies of participant demographic questionnaires were secured in locked files only accessible by the research team.

Coding of the transcripts was conducted using Atlas.ti software for qualitative data. The three person research team, led by the Principal Investigator, regularly cross-checked and compared their codes to ensure reliability and consensus among their codes. Once a list of primary codes was reconciled, the researchers returned to the data to identify sub-codes

associated with each primary code. These sub-codes were developed using a similar consensus-building strategy.

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I. Accessing Resources

Summary:

Responses to this question fell into one of three categories: (1) formal systems of support; (2) informal systems of support; and (3) no use of support. For those that reported utilizing support services, the overall message seemed to be that participants prefer having a "known" person to whom they can go for information about needed supports. Examples frequently given included Family Readiness Officers, Family Readiness Groups, Ombudsman, and Key Spouses.

Participants reported willingness to seek support depended a great deal on the recommendation of a trusted family member, friend, neighbor, or co-worker. In other words, even if participants were aware of a program or service, they reported being much more likely to access it if someone they knew had already done so and reported a positive experience. Formal classes were also highlighted as an important resource. Topics like career supports (e.g. interviewing, resume writing) and financial issues (e.g. budgeting, car buying, loans, etc.) were frequently mentioned as helpful. Again, these programs provided a direct link with a "live" resource and were more likely to be attended on the recommendation of someone the participants knew and trusted.

It is important to note that many participants reported being surprised by the large number of programs and services that were available for service members and their families through the military. Though it was only mentioned a few times, participants seemed frustrated by the fact that certain programs are available only to certain branches of the military. This comment seemed most prevalent from participants in areas in which service branches were co-located. Participants expressed a desire for more unification among the service branches when it came to providing support services, such that it would be simpler for someone from one branch of service to access the services of another branch.

A. FORMAL SYSTEMS OF SUPPORTS

Key Areas:

1. Formal Centers/Supports. Examples included Fleet and Family Support Center (FFSC), Family Readiness Center, Army Community Services (ACS), Marine Family Services/MCCS, Military Family Life Consultants, Lifestyle Insights Networking Knowledge and Skills (LINKS), and Moral Welfare & Recreation. Both service members and family members reported using these formal supports as an avenue for learning about classes or workshops they could attend, and events that were happening. The discussion of the supports and services provided by these centers were overwhelmingly supportive. Some participants reported that they prefer to access information through these centers rather than through Military

OneSource because these participants believed that these centers had more specific information about their particular installation and local community.

"Fleet and Family Services came in and everybody came in and talked to us and they all prepped us...and they did an excellent job. I've had excellent contacts. Matter of fact, I've been back for 2 years and I've still got some group out of [location] that has been contacted through the Navy asking me if I'm okay and they give me counseling information and everything else... my daughter needed counseling while I was gone and Fleet and Family Services, they got on the phone and took care of it."

"My only experiences with the services have all been positive... I've always sought out to see if the military could help me with it first... I've always had positive experiences and if not, even if something was slightly negative, they were more than happy to listen to that and figure out what went wrong and how to fix it next time and in turn that inspired me to my friends that I didn't want to have to Google for two hours to try to find this workshop or something I would tell them about it and just going to the services there are, I've never had a problem with them personally. Maybe a little bit the Tri-Care, the medical side is a little frustrating."

2. Military OneSource (MOS). MOS was the only support program that was mentioned by name in the study. Generally speaking, for those who had utilized MOS, the experience was reported as positive. The majority of participants who had used it reported having good experiences and believed it to be a valuable resource that perhaps needed only slight modifications in certain areas. However, it is also important to note that many participants were NOT familiar with this resource, or were familiar with it in terms of the name (i.e. had seen a poster with MOS on it) but not in terms of its function.

"I love military OneSource...If they do not have the info I request they call or email me back soon with the info I need...they search for it.. make calls... Military OneSource is the first place I turn to..."

"We get all these posters that we get immune to looking at posters, we get numb to it. And when we go into someone place that says oh Navy OneSource, or Military OneSource, or whatever, it's just another poster."

"I saw it on a little flyer thing just at the Joint center, but all I know is that's where you go to get everything."

a. Customer Service. Customer service associated with the 1-800 MOS phone number also received mixed reviews. While there were those who described their over-the-phone interaction as a positive experience and helpful, just as many (if not more) were put off by what they described as "rude" MOS representatives. Several

participants commented on the MOS representative's lack of familiarity with the military culture. Others explained that the referrals they received via MOS were inaccurate or not up-to-date.

"It has been outstanding, this has been a great source for information and has provided the opportunity for me and my family to get information. This agency has true customer support in my opinion they truly care about the member and assist."

"Military OneSource is as good as the people on the other line because if they're not knowledgeable, then they're not going to be able to support...It's only as good as the people that are there. It seems like that they don't hire people and train them into our community culture. They don't understand where our installations are, where our installations are located, what state they're in because you're calling a central line in the middle of who knows where..."

"Going back to your Military OneSource. I don't use them. I'm sorry, but I've resourced people out to them only coming back and they're disappointed...And then that makes me look bad because here's a resource that I'm giving, that's my job to resource it out, and I'm getting the feedback, the feedback is saying they didn't help me. They told me to go look at this. That place is not even open. This childcare is not even provided anymore. That just made me look bad so now I have to find locally resources here to assist them."

b. Counseling Services. Many of those who described using MOS counseling described it as a positive experience. The fact that it was outsourced and the therapist was not directly linked to the military was an important selling point as it was perceived to enhance confidentiality. Others reported that it was important for the therapists to have some knowledge of military life and its culture.

"The two people that I have known that have called for either couples or themselves they called and said, hey, this is my issue and they said, okay, we're going to set up six sessions for you, here's three different people to choose from out in town, and they were done. It was so easy. They were shocked at how easy it was."

"... I had gotten back from deployment and I started seeing, we started seeing a marriage counselor. Not for the wrong things just kind of to make our relationship better whatever. So, I thought about coming here on base at one time, but then I thought about that stigma with having to worry about who is going to find out especially for my wife because she's the active duty one. So, we outsourced, you know, we got the information, Military OneSource somebody that we can use that there's nothing that our

commands or whatever can go. So, once we started going through that comparing it to something we have been through before and feeling that it's a lot better. The civilian that we went through--they had to go through some basic classes to get knowledge of the military to make sure they understand because a lot of times you can't bring in somebody that doesn't understand the nature of military life or the community within, you know. So the person that we talked to did their classes and went through whatever courses, you know, through the key volunteer programs here on base and, you know, they got knowledge, they got knowledge and then they started doing their practice of being an outsource person..."

c. Website. The MOS website received mixed reviews from participants. Many praised it as a comprehensive source of information that also provides resources for military families. At the same time, many (including some of those who had good things to say about MOS as a whole) talked about the difficulty in navigating the website.

"My experience with Military OneSource has been quite extensive. I find it a great tool for online research... The website has been a tremendous support."

"Fantastic!!! I love that website. I sent in a question looking for information and they got back to me so quickly with exactly what I was looking for!"

"Where I work we strongly advise people to use Military OneSource. In fact, we like give them whatever handouts we can. The only problem is...when I tell people to go on to the Military OneSource, I literally tell them, all right, you're going to type this in to go here because if they don't know where they're going, they'll get lost and then my advice using that just went down the tube."

"...I'll also say I don't find their website extremely user friendly to navigate...it's too much for my brain to handle."

d. Resources. Many participants named specific free resources they found useful on the MOS website. These included the tax filing assistance, the Sesame Street and Elmo DVDs about deployment, the MyCAA program (Military Spouse Career Advancement Accounts), and free books.

"Actually when my husband was deployed last year, I found out about a link off the Military OneSource page: My CAA. It's \$6,000 for free school. It was the best thing I've ever seen in the nine years I've been married. I was like, all right, tuition assistance for me. They are on point, they're wonderful, wonderful with that and they are very quick about getting you in. I think maybe I waited two weeks until they were like all right you're good, here's your money. Have fun. Go graduate."

"This will be our second year using it for the tax service. We decided to save our money from H&R Block and do it on our own so it's free."

"You can actually get books for free about stress, about deployments, Play-aways, which are the new little audio headphones that you can walk around with books and they have so much that's free that they'll mail out free of charge and they just have a wealth of information for children all the way up to students and adults even for the aging, they have ones about aging stress free and everything."

3. People. Individuals who were directly affiliated with the military were frequently cited as primary sources of information related to programs, services and events. Examples included the Chain of Command, Squadron Leaders, Family Readiness Officers, Family Readiness Groups, Ombudsman, Key Spouse Volunteers, and Individual Augmentee Coordinators.

One of the most frequently mentioned formal supports were Family Readiness Groups (FRG) and Family Readiness Officers (FRO). Participant responses varied greatly, highlighting the lack of consistency from location to location. In some cases, participants described their FRG/FRO as their main source of information for learning about supports for military families. In other cases, participants reported that they felt the FRG/FRO involvement left much to be desired. The inconsistency between the level of FRGs' involvement seemed troubling for many.

"My husband was gone for a year and my FRO hardly even made contact with me. I didn't have kids so it wasn't like I was one of his priorities. He like literally pushed me to the side and like, well, you're not as important as the people who has kids. I thought I was equally important as the people who have kids. I mean I knew nothing about anything that was going on the whole deployment. I got emails after the fact that things had gone on, and anything, any letters, any mailed items that came to me was like a month late. It had been sent from the command from just regular mail...it's like he didn't even bother trying to find out the information a lot of the times."

"On the flip side of that, we, my husband is with a battalion that deploys on cycle every six months...He's constantly, constantly either deployed or working up for that. Because of that our FRO is extremely ready for deployment so my deployments have been smooth..."

"... I hear everything through my FRO. Everything. And I have friends in different battalions who haven't even met their FRO and have never gotten one email from their FRO and I literally get like three a day. So, I don't know like I guess there's no consistency there and it's kind of, it's a shame because I'm involved with so much stuff and I have friends that are in different battalions that aren't involved with anything and they are missing out and they don't know...My one friend said she didn't meet one wife in her

husband's battalion the entire time he was deployed, and I know almost every single one of them by name."

The Ombudsman was mentioned frequently and with high praise among Navy affiliated participants. The Ombudsman seemed to play an increasingly important role for family members when the service member was deployed.

"...Like I said, my daughter needed counseling and they took it up. And when they heard that that she wasn't adjusting, no problem, they brought her right in. And I don't know if it wasn't for our Ombudsman who really paved the way. I mean she definitely knew where to go. She knew who to call and you know that's one of the things that is, people really underestimate what that Ombudsman does. She is really the backbone of the family side and you know my sister who was taking care of my daughter called our Ombudsman and man she was on it. So it's, these programs are only as strong as what your Ombudsman knows as well. Okay, so if she's really not experienced and you know she's really almost a detriment."

4. Multi-media Resources. Participants reported the use of other resources as well. These included accessing military websites specific to the installation where participants were currently located and/or noticing installation billboards about upcoming events. Participants also reported using many non-military websites to search for support information (e.g. Google, Yahoo, Facebook).

Participants reported receiving a great deal of information via emails distributed from the Ombudsman, the FRG leader, the Key Volunteer, the Squadron Leader and others. Participants reported the email resources were both useful and overwhelming, describing them as not always being relevant to their particular circumstance.

" I do websites, my Army life, Army Reserve websites, Navy websites; I'm always looking for information, working in the program I'm always looking. Wherever I go if I see a flyer I bring all the stuff home."

"On [installation] when you drive they have like a billboard and it always gives information, the current. Sometimes you need a reminder there's such a mass of information and then you need a reminder, oh, yeah, it was this weekend so you always have the billboard. I think that's great."

"A huge improvement that I know I utilize and a lot of people are utilizing is the MCPON [Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy] being on FaceBook. The information we're getting for free without having to go anywhere just by having him or being a fan of him on FaceBook ...he has a FaceBook page now, and he puts out naval history and naval traditions, news in the Navy, photo of the day, and if you just fan him, it's amazing. And Fleet and Family, too, and MWR... Mostly though Fleet and Family and the MCPON they are

getting so much info out and on such a more global level...I think that's awesome."

B. INFORMAL SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

Key Areas:

1. Family. Participants stated that they found out about the programs and services that were available through family members (usually this was because their family member was also a service member, was formerly a service member, or worked for a program on base). Participants talked about utilizing their family as a network for support while their spouse was deployed. Participants stated that knowing a family member had experienced a similar situation and accessed a particular resource, made the participant *more likely* to utilize the same resources.

"So I don't want that guy, I want the guy that my father trusts or that my mother trusts or that my best friend, who went through the same exact military situation that I did, who he went to. And he had an experience. You know what I mean?...That's the guy I want."

2. Friends and Neighbors. Participants specifically talked about receiving information about programs and services, as well general information about the military from friends. Participants talked about receiving support from friends and neighbors, especially during their spouse's deployment.

"...if my wife or anything needed any help, they're [friends at work] always come over...and if something broke one of the guys would come over and fix it or something...I had one neighbor that was an ex-Marine, and he stayed over, and he would cut the yard, even when I was gone this last time. Him and his wife would come over and check on my wife and cut the yard or whatever needed help."

"...it was a really tough deployment. That's all I can say... It was very tough. If it wasn't for friends and neighbors, it would have been a lot worse."

"... I have a certain few select people that I would go to, to ask or that I would go to open up with, 'I have this problem and this is a real problem,' who can I go to, to talk about that?"

"I think a lot of them find that it's just too much work to go and look up where they can just get it word-by-mouth whenever they need the resources. You're on the computer, you know, simply type in for a lot of them it's too much process to go through and if I need something, I can just ask someone, my neighbor or my friend, and they can tell me. That's what we found having

the spouses in our command, you know, it's just too much work to go in there and look up, you know, I wanted a quick, somebody give me an answer right away."

3. Other Spouses or Service Members. Participants stated that they found out information about programs and services from other spouses. Participants also discussed the importance of "seasoned" spouses being able to provide a wealth of knowledge to other spouses, especially new spouses to the military. Service members reported that they got information from other service members, but not necessarily those in their own unit.

"... I think as spouses, Active Duty and non-Active Duty that's one of the things that we, is most valuable is that we can pass on the information word of mouth is we know everything that's going on on-base because we tell each other. If there's an event, if there's, you know, something not right, we tell each other. You know, and that's what one of the best things I think we could do for the military is just take this with you to your base-to-base-to-base-to-base and, you know, make sure it follows people; that would be good."

"Yeah, husbands talk to husbands, wives talk to wives. Especially once you're deployed, there becomes an unofficial network at least from our experience. And us wives, we talked about the benefits and I'm sure, you know, my husband, his other sailors that he was stationed with, they all discussed the same thing. So that's how it got around to us."

C. NOT USING SUPPORTS

Key Areas:

1. No Need. Many participants reported that their needs were being met without the aid of formal supports.

"Well, I mainly just don't know about them. And some, I usually don't, I don't use them, I don't have to use them."

"I haven't, the only program I really use here is the post-deployment counseling. Any of the other type services I think what they offer is really good for the younger sailors like money management and all these other little programs, but I'm a little bit past that point of needing that type of assistance, you know, I'm pretty much established, you know, I've got funds, I've got money, I've got a grown daughter, you know, I've been married for a long enough time so I don't need any of those services."

2. Irrelevant Programs. Many participants discussed their belief that the programs and services available are primarily targeted to younger service members and those with families, with fewer offerings for more "seasoned" service members, single service members

or those without children. These participants reported that the assumption seems to be that they do not need services.

"We don't currently use any of the programs. We're aware of them just pretty much like everyone else here ... We don't have children, like small children at home. Our children are 19 and so we don't have those issues that a lot of people probably have to deal with when their soldier returns."

"...The FRG does stuff, but I'm not involved because most of the people have little small kids and so I really don't participate but to me there's nothing."

"... My husband was at a headquarter staff position when he was here a lot of senior folks and I think there's oftentimes the misconception amongst the senior folks that we're all senior, we don't need anything, you know? We've been there, done that and, yeah, geez, [husband] has been on active duty for 20 years. I work at ACS as well, I'm educated, I know how to go find what I need, but it would be really nice not to have to often go look for it. All of that said I honestly haven't reached out to a lot of those services either. I mean I have a support system of close friends and that kind of thing. So, I've got that I need. If I weren't getting what I need, then I would probably go search out for it."

"Me, I didn't know about most of them [supports]. And the ones that I do know about don't pertain to me because I don't have children or a spouse or relatives."

II. Barriers to Accessing Supports

Summary

Consistent with Johnson et al. (2007), the barriers cited in this study also tended to fall into one of three interrelated categories: (1) awareness; (2) accessibility; and (3) acceptability. Awareness refers to participants' knowledge of specific programs, supports and their benefits. Accessibility refers to participants' perceptions of ease of access—in terms of timing, location, and customer service issues. Acceptability refers to participants' perceptions of whether or not it is really okay to seek services or supports. Participants noted that they seem to receive mixed messages about utilizing supports. While participants reported the availability of many services, they also voiced deep concerns about the stigma accompanying the actual use of these services and supports. Issues of confidentiality and the difficulty in maintaining it were frequently cited, a further indication that stigma is still associated with seeking supports. Participants voiced concern about being perceived as weak by their superiors, subordinates, or even fellow service members if it were known that they needed any supports, thus negatively impacting their career trajectory.

A. AWARENESS OF SUPPORTS

Key Areas:

1. Overwhelming and Confusing. "Information overload" was frequently mentioned. Participants acknowledged that at various points in time they were given information about various supports and services. They further stated, however, that because the information was not relevant to their situation at that time, they saw little need to remember it. Thus when they actually needed it, they could not remember what it was or how to access it.

"We, just like you said, there is a lot of information out there that we, I just didn't have the need for at the time or where to find the answer that I needed just cause there was so much, there was an overwhelming amount of information."

"And then as far as other services, you know what's available in a given area I feel like there's some challenge. I feel like it's almost overwhelming. You don't know where to go to get or you don't know what's, what all is available in an area because some things are available on the Air Force installation and other things are available on the Navy base, and you don't really have one consolidated website."

"I think that when people do finally come home, and they're under a lot of stress and they're just having a totally bad time and all that, they don't really want to find these numbers and locate these people and have conversations

with these people, because they're just adding another load onto their already stressful life. They don't want to add something else onto it every day. You know, just locating the numbers and somebody who will actually deal with you is hard enough as it is. You don't want that extra stressor on you."

2. Unawareness of Programs and Available Supports. On the other hand, some participants actually reported not receiving information about programs and supports that were available. In most of these cases, the participants were spouses of service members. These spouses reported that their service member forgot to share information because he/she was too busy at work performing his/her job. Participants reported that when the service member spouse came home, he/she forgets to pass on the information received through emails or word of mouth. In some cases, this omission by the service member to their spouse was cited as a simple oversight. In other cases, spouses suggested that the omission was intentional—that the service member did not necessarily want their spouse to know what was going on because the family members' use of services might reflect poorly on the service member. Participants stated that their service member spouse only tells them information on a "need to know basis". Other spouses talked about the idea that service members want to keep their home life separate from their military life.

"...I know from experience with my husband he went through all those classes [about supports]. Did he come home and tell me about any of those things? Not at all."

"And, you know, I have a wonderful husband, you know, I cannot complain about my husband, but I can tell you what he can be a barrier to me. He gets busy all day long, sees e-mails coming through, and I'll hear about things that are happening on base maybe a week later because he is so busy trying to perform the function of his job...And it's not, you know, intentionally holding information back from me, but it's not important to him, which would be important to me? We have these arguments all the time why didn't you tell me? So, getting information to spouses is always, always a problem."

"Another one of the barriers and I think this kind of relates is sometimes the soldier doesn't want usually his wife, not always but usually, to know what's going on. It's a control issue sometimes... I've seen a lot of people where the soldier keeps all the information from their spouse."

3. Timing of Information about Supports. Service member participants reported inefficiency in how, and more importantly, when, they were informed about support programs. Specifically, they cited the fact that information about supports was usually "advertised" or pushed during pre-deployment and post-deployment times. Service members discussed how this was poor timing because their minds were either occupied with their upcoming duty or with spending time with their families. Upon return from

deployment, service members acknowledged learning about support programs but admitted that their most pressing concern at that point was getting home to see their families, not worrying about their own state of mind. They candidly spoke of not being honest in post-deployment assessments because they knew if they were 'flagged' with any issues, it meant more time on the installation and a delay in being reunited with their families.

"...when you get back home, you're just ready to, 'Hey I don't want to be bothered with this.' Just go home..."

"...the questionnaire really don't do. You're just marking the questions so you can get home. I mean, you ain't been in the country for six months, seven months. You're not thinking about anything, but, 'Hey, I want to get to my comfortable bed, my family, you know, get me some good food.' And you don't want to be stuck in a barracks and stuff like that. You're just ready to go."

"I would also say that it is a function of time. You know, by the time I'm done with deployment, I just want to go on leave, I don't want to do anything, I don't want anybody to tell me what to do, I don't want any ridiculous requirements, I really want to go be by myself or I want to hang out with my girlfriend or my wife or whatever or my kids and that's it..So it seems like those windows of emphasis are pre-deployment and post-deployment, but they also correlate to when I don't want to have anything to do with anybody else, much less my best friend, I just want to be with certain people, it's not a counselor during that certain time."

B. ACCESS

Key areas:

1. Location of Support Services. Participants often reported that programs and services were not located in a central area on installations. In fact, many reported the location of such support services as "remote" thus impacting their willingness and ability to utilize the resources.

"...out of sight, out of mind, like on the other side of the base behind the building nobody uses...It is always in the remote corner of the base in some run down building from, you know, the 20s, I mean, like I said, they probably got a lot of wonderful services, but it's just not that great of an opportunity to be able to go over there."

2. Customer Service Issues. Issues related to customer service were frequently cited as barriers to accessing services. Those areas mentioned most included issues related to staff and those related to hours of operation.

a. Staff. Participants voiced concern with the level of customer service they receive. Some participants suggested that the sometimes lack of competition among services on the installation leads to poor customer service. Participants also reported frustration with staff that do not have a working knowledge of the military or military culture. This lack of military cultural knowledge was most evident in discussion related to outsourced counseling services and those counselors' understanding of the warrior ethos and the difficulty in seeking support.

"A lot of people don't have the proper information you're looking for...And I feel like they're all just very lazy about it. They could find it out for us, but they don't want to...So, everything that I've had to get done I have to keep bothering them and keep very consistent on them to get what I need...It's very frustrating."

"I remember my first phone call over here the first question I was asked was do you feel like killing yourself? I was like, whoa, I do not want to be involved in any of this crazy stuff. I was like, I'll try later...That set me back where I'm like is that the first question? I mean I know it's on checklist somewhere that well, we need to ask that, 'do you feel like hurting someone?'...It was just kind of too much right off the bat just making a, you know, trying to make an appointment to see somebody, you know...so I was like that's a little bit maybe too strong and maybe, I know you have some kind of check sheet that they go off or whatever, but kind of dial it back a little bit maybe...at least you can get that person in and then ask them that question, you know...Because if you ask them that before they come in odds are they're going to be like, wow, click and just walk off and they're gone."

"I had an issue with going to the family services support center whatever it is, because you walk up in there and there's like 80 different services that these people offer, and they're all staring you down, and you're like, uh, you know what, is this really worth it? Cause, they're all like, you know, retired or have something to do with the military at one point in time and they are all giving you that look...They'll look at you, like, you know, just watch you walk in, like 'what's he going to do?, what's he going to do?' And almost the same look that you get from like, you know, a person at a jewelry counter when you are walking through the store to get to the mall. Right?...I mean the Fleet and Family Support Center is, you know, a wonderful thing, I'm sure they provide a lot of good services, but just to walk up in there, it just feels really weird."

b. Hours of Operation. Participants expressed frustration regarding the hours that some support services were offered. They noted that the hours of operation for some programs did not always coincide with their duty day. They also noted that oftentimes childcare issues inhibited their ability to attend the programs that were offered. Additionally, participants voiced frustration in having to inform their

commanders about where they were going (thus compromising confidentiality) if they needed to access services offered during the day (e.g. counseling).

"We've utilized ACS services as well and oftentimes what I find was a service from ACS is that they're not always available when we need them to be available. They typically are only open during regular business hours so if you're someone that works or someone that can only come in on the weekend they don't offer that flexibility and oftentimes if you even try to make it right before they close, they'll let you know that you need to come back tomorrow. So, their inability to flex with the time."

"I work. That's the problem I find is that a lot of the programs and stuff is geared to the wives that don't work and it's not geared to the wives who do work and that's been my biggest complaint even within our FRG. They'll hold something and it's ten o'clock in the morning. It's at noon. I work. What about all these spouses they can't go to your little company picnic because it's at one o'clock in the afternoon and we can't get off."

"Well you ask your chain of command, hey petty officer can I go over to Fleet and Family Services real quick? [I'm asked] "What are you going over there for?" I mean you got to have some kind of excuse to go over there because, you know, it's usually during working hours and of course most people live off of the base, so when they are on the base they want to go while they are at work."

3. Assumptions

a. Perceived Impact on Career. Participants repeatedly voiced concern that their use of family support services (particularly counseling or financial services) would negatively impact their career (or spouse's career). Service members in leadership positions talked about their fear of appearing weak and losing respect from those under their command.

"...I know some friends of mine that used [Family Support Center] to get a loan, you know it's supposed to be anonymous, or you don't have to go through your chain of command, you can just go to them if you are in need. But, it would always come back to their chain of command and they would get involved and be like hey, what do you need and you'd be like relax man, I've taken care of it."

"At one point my husband and I were having difficulties, and I wanted to go see a marriage counselor and his concern was that because of his security clearance any kind of counseling that he went to could essentially bump him out of his job..."

"Then like I said before everything you say can get back to your chain of command so nobody wants to be honest...If you're having a problem like a real problem, you have to tip toe around explaining that problem so that you don't get in trouble."

"...I can tell you right now, if I'm the guy, even if I'm a Commander, but I need counseling, you know, I can guarantee you I'm not going to make that public because there is no way I want my Marines thinking that I somehow have lost it or I don't have my edge... I can't maintain my Command presence by doing that."

b. Confidentiality. The notion of confidentiality was most prominent throughout the listening sessions. Service members were adamant about not wanting others to know they were utilizing counseling or mental health services (including both chain of command and other service members in their command). This sentiment seemed to be connected to the perceived stigma attached to seeking supports as well as to the "warrior ethos" (see below).

"That prevented me from coming in for a while was that stigma that, okay, you're a Navy leader, you're in a certain position. It's almost like it's a sign of weakness when it shouldn't be or it's like now there's a perceived chink in your armor...So, everybody you're competing against now has either something on you or a leg up on you that they can, you know, use to jockey for position or whatever to, you know, sway the balance of you or them being in charge or you or them being selected for something there's always the thought of that that would be used against you. Well, he went to, you know, counseling. What if we put him in charge here, and he has a meltdown or a flashback or, you know, crazy thoughts that they think about."

"You don't really even want people to know if you have a cold--much less a mental health issues."

"I know when my husband came back from his deployment, he was having I guess you could say the typical issues with going out in crowds and various other things, and I tried to really encourage him to get on OneSource or contact somebody and he had the stigma problem with, 'oh, but if the command finds out, you know, that could be my job, that could be my promotion, that could be this.' And finally, you know, I cornered him and finally made him get some help and he's doing so much better and no repercussions."

C. ACCEPTABILITY

Key Areas:

1. Military Culture, Warrior Ethos. Participants expressed how difficult it is to admit they need help. Participants frequently mentioned the culture of the military as one of promoting strength and hiding weakness. According to participants, this warrior ethos or identity is so pervasive that service members are reluctant to seek help for fear of being perceived as weak.

"I would also say a lot of the resources are based around counseling and those resources I think in the military culture it's really, like, not macho or whatever to take advantage of that. So many people will say like even one of my friends who was going through counseling never told anybody but one person in his chain of command that he was going to counseling. It was always he told all of his buddies that he was going to dentist appointments and doctor's appointments because it's like embarrassing to them for whatever reason, which is like a huge problem."

"And especially when you combine that with the military, where it's a tough guy factory and you never want to be the guy that admits that, 'I can't make it' or 'I'm struggling' or 'I need extra help'. You know, you don't want to do that. It's not engrained into our culture."

"Where I came in through my Navy upbringing was don't whine, don't bitch, don't complain, you know, suck it up, you know, you stand six and six watches, you know, you work two, three weeks in a row and no days off and stuff like that. It's kind of ingrained in you that, you know, grind it out, grind it out, grind it out and you'll be fine."

2. Conflicting Messages. Participants voiced frustration over what they perceive to be mixed messages about accessing support services. On the one hand, many acknowledged that they are encouraged to ask for support when they need it. On the other hand, these same participants voiced hesitation in trusting that they would not be penalized for doing so.

"I've got to tell you...they are talking a good game, but bottom line upfront it don't matter what you go in to seek services for they're going to look at you twice from that point forward."

"...I think they [Command] tell us, okay, always get checked out, stay healthy. But...no one goes to medical, this can cause you to be held up. They tell you, 'don't go to medical', but if you are sitting up here hurt, why didn't you tell me 'don't go to medical'? Why, why go to medical and I don't get fussed at for the medical. It's so conflicting every time you hear, you can do

this, but you can't do it so you're like straddling fears every time. Okay, if I do it, what would happen? If I don't do it, what would happen? So, everybody is pretty much stuck in the middle and scared to do anything."

III. National Guard/Reserve Issues

Summary:

National Guard and Reserve service members and their families reported some unique concerns from those reported by Active Duty service members and their families. These issues are highlighted here and include: (1) their unique culture of service; (2) difficulty accessing supports; (3) differences in funding mechanisms; and (4) continuity of support services and programs.

Key Areas:

1. Culture of Service. Responses from National Guard and Reserve affiliated participants suggested that they felt caught between their civilian and military worlds. On the one hand, some participants expressed a lack of support from the civilian community. Participants often assumed this was because civilians in their community do not understand what it is like to be in the military. This feeling was described as being a "military family in a civilian world." On the other hand, participants stated that the military community does not understand what it is like to be a National Guard and Reserve family. Participants used words like "isolated," "invisible" and "not connected" to describe their experience.

"I think for Reserves, soldiers and families that the biggest challenge is getting big Army to understand the challenges of Reserve families and soldiers. They're very different from those of the active component and oftentimes we are force fed the Army motto, you know, what works for the Army has to work for us and it doesn't. We're different. It just does not and it's insulting sometimes because we say 'this will work better,' and you know, big Army will come and say 'well, no, no, no, you know, you guys just don't know what you're doing, this is going to work better'."

"I often find that friends and neighbors ignore us because they don't know how to treat us when Mike is on his deployments. Life is long and hard. I recently visited [installation] and thought how fantastic it would be to live on or near a large base. How nice it would be to participate in more things with other military families."

"My children are facing their father's 3rd IA deployment. They have no friends who can understand the stress of dad being gone. They have no support at school and there are few/none resources in our area."

2. Difficulty Accessing Supports. National Guard and Reserve participants expressed frustration in their ability to access supports. They cited geographic isolation as a major barrier. These participants spoke of feeling like they were "falling through the cracks" or were "cut off" from the military once they return home from deployment.

"Yeah, for me when I demob now that I'm back state side, everybody keeps telling me I fell through a crack...So, now the question is for me is how do I fill in that crack...With everything that's been done and going through the chain of command seems to be more of a barrier than it is a help. So, is there a civilian source that's out there? Because if I was full-time military, there's always something right there. I can walk into the TMC or the medic station and go, hey, something is wrong with me and they're going to take care of me. Well, again, once we're cut off, once our ETS date is done, there's nothing there."

"...Active Duty lives this Army life everyday and a lot of the things they're used to. They're used to accessing ACS (even if many don't). They're used to, you know, going on post and getting the information that they need or going to the command. The Reservists, when they come back they have another, what 30 days and then they're out and then who is going to check on them? Who is going to let them know there's a new program out?..."

"Fleet and Family is so far away from where a lot of live... Where I live, the base isn't even close. I've closed down two reserve centers...Yeah, they are just out there. I think there is, probably isn't anything, the closest base is [installation] and that's 110 miles away."

"My husband works full time for the Army National Guard, so we are basically a military family living in a civilian world. We have to travel to get to many things and we live in a large state. Often we are unable to attend events due to distance."

3. Understanding Funding Mechanisms. Participants expressed a great deal of confusion about how funding for programs works, both at the Federal and State level. They often expressed frustration over what they perceived to be inequalities in funding for support services.

"...that's where the National Guard families they have this animosity against the active duty families because they [Active Duty] got all this because they don't understand the money is federally funded. [State] National Guard is state funded so that's where our families don't understand and then they need to be educated of why and everybody keeps saying, 'oh, the different color of money' and that's all I hear. There's the blue money, the green money and that's all we hear because it is an issue, but I don't think our National Guard families understand why there's so much for them [Active Duty] and there's not enough for us."

"Recently we've had many new programs started and offered to the Reserves, which are great ideas, great programs, but sometimes they're not resourced appropriately, they're not staffed adequately so you may have a great

program, but not a lot of thought went on the execution, you know, they're going to do this, but how are they going to execute it, the money is not there, the personnel is not there, now you've added an additional responsibility and we're at a loss on, you know, how to execute what should be a good program, it flops...It just gets thrown, new program, execute it, with what money? You know, it might be a lot of money, but the wrong color money so you can have all this money, but if it's the wrong color money, it doesn't do you any good or it might have been a great program but you have two staff members to, you know, host these conferences for 500 people. You're killing yourselves."

4. Continuity of Support Services and Program. Participants seemed to have a difficult time understanding the rationale for receiving support for their family from specific military programs and services *only* during deployment times. This lack of continuity seemed particularly salient in participants' discussion of health care. They expressed great frustration in having to change doctors and treatment plans (e.g. on-going therapies) after the service member was demobilized. Several gave examples of being denied similar services with their civilian health care when they were no longer eligible for Tri-Care. An additional concern was expressed about the perceived decline in staffing/manpower allotted to assist National Guard and Reserve service members and families. Many of the National Guard and Reserve participants expressed dissatisfaction with Military OneSource as a resource because it was not local.

"Well, we had been getting medical care at [military hospital], and my husband has been going through a lot of rehab and come February that was stopped. We will no longer have access to [military hospital] because we're National Guard. That's a big program and we've been being treated there for a year and a half and now we have to change doctors. I think that that's something that needs to definitely change. We need to be treated the same. Our soldiers fight the same as the active soldiers. We need to be treated as such. When it comes to financial resources or other resources, that stops the moment their orders stop. We're no longer considered welcome into that environment anymore...We just get cut off of everything...Our ID's change back and we're no longer part of the Army, we're the National Guard and I think we get, a lot of times we get treated sub-standard because of that."

"I've only been in the Reserves eight years, and when I came here there was a plethora [of support staff]. Now you're lucky if you can find a skeleton..."

"[There are] few resources for kids to National Guard after deployments. Kids aren't identified as military when back in the civilian world."

IV. Child and Youth Issues

Summary:

Participants' discussion of child and youth issues covered a spectrum of topics and varied a great deal in terms of context. These issues grouped into four main categories: (1) child care; (2) programs that help military children; (3) recognition of extended family members and caregivers of military children; and (4) educational issues.

Key Areas:

1. Programs for Military Children and Youth. Programs and services geared towards military children were some of the most commonly mentioned topics. Participants discussed several programs that they valued for their help in explaining deployments to their children and in helping them cope. The MOS Sesame Street/Elmo DVD, the program that allowed service members to read books to their children during their deployment via DVD, Operation Homefront, and several other programs were noted by name. While most praised the current amount of supports in place to help children understand and cope with deployments, others felt there could be more done to help parents and children during this difficult process. Additionally, many participants noted that most programs and activities were geared towards younger children and suggested that more was needed to help teenagers.

"The Elmo DVD...Great video, again, excellent tool, but what happens when your kid has seen it ten times and, you know, they know it by heart what's next, what follows, what can go with that that can be added to that?...it's hard for your children to understand, you know, what is wrong with dad? Why is dad grumpy again? You know, they see it and they're trying to understand it."

"...that program [The Readiness and Deployment Support and Training Program] really, really helped us a lot because they kind of know things about the mind of my child that I don't know. It's things that she [my child] doesn't ever vocalize-- like that sometimes the kids relate deployment to the last time that they got in trouble and they think that daddy left because she went in timeout seven times that day or something. And that you know, she never vocalized that ever-- and they told me that's probably what she had thought and I didn't believe them until he [dad] came home [from deployment] and the first time she went to timeout she just started bawling saying daddy don't leave, daddy don't leave. So, there's a lot of things kids rationalize things so much differently than we do. The nice thing about programs like that is that they take the children into a room, they do a puppet show and then the other trainer takes the mom into the room and explains to them this is what could be going through your child's head, these are ways to combat it, this is something you can expect they're going to start doing this and acting out and et cetera, when dad comes home. Because a lot of times I know I didn't

realize either homecoming is more stressful than deployment...but these people are educated in the matter, they knew and they were able to tell me so I was able to, you know, in turn combat that and have the things ready for that..."

"...Operation Homefront..was the countdown that we used and my husband was gone for 12 months so that was a big count down for the three girls. It's something fun, it's something family oriented...It was just something fun that the girls could do with other kids that may not necessarily be with the spouses you were deployed with, but it was a wonderful way of counting down a month, that was another month gone."

"I think there is a lot of support for the younger children. For teenage children there's not a lot. There's a lot lacking. Every once in a while they'll set up a teen center and it'll go for a while and then fizzle out because a lot of it comes down to the nature of teens, too. Teens are a very hard group to even...match neurons with anyway, but, you know, there's just not a lot of things for the teens to do on base. It seems like everything is geared toward nine and down."

2. Child & Youth Services: Staffing, Hours and Fees. Based on the number of times Child Development Centers (CDC) and Child & Youth Services (CYS) were mentioned by participants, it seems clear that these services were viewed as an invaluable resource to military families. The benefit of having on-base child care services and youth activities were often mentioned. However, participants were also very vocal about the programs' shortcomings and deficiencies in the area of staffing, hours of operation and fees. Specific concerns were that the centers did not have an adequate number of staff to meet the demand for services, the hours of operation were not congruent with duty hours and the sliding fee scale was unfair to those at the higher end of the scale.

"...she [spouse] couldn't work because, of course, she had to take care of her kids and he [husband] was deployed, but there was never any slots available at daycare for her to have a break. So that was a barrier because they're understaffed and they just have too many kids. I was on the waiting list for like six months. I mean it's daycare."

"We also use the youth center and the child development center and to me they're not here to serve us...you've got that ten hour window. After that ten hour window, which I don't get off until four thirty, that's my ten hour window, you get charged a dollar a minute...It's not like we're walking around at the commissary or gathering around, you know, those are my hours of duty...I don't see why you should be charging me...I'm here for the mission, you know, you have to support us and in my eyes you're not being supportive..."

"Even the bracket when they charge you, you know...we're the highest category, you know, and I mean on paper it looks pretty, but that's not what we're receiving every 1st and 15th. Where do you all get those numbers from, you know? I mean so it's tough, you know, and like right now it's cheaper for me--it might not be believable now--but it's cheaper for me to put my child in a private learning center outside of the base, which is open from six thirty, you know, to five thirty, which then I won't have that problem, but now I'm on a waiting list."

2. Recognition of Extended Family Members and other Parental Supports. Several participants expressed the need for the military to grant extended family members and other caregivers greater access to programs, housing, and insurance benefits. Participants reported that these extended family members and caregivers act as a major support to the military family and that making it difficult for these extended family members and caregivers to gain equal access to these programs creates unnecessary stress to an already stressed military family. Parental support in general was also viewed as a topic of interest and concern. While some discussed current programs and resources in place to support parents, others called for further supports for parents, especially around times of deployment.

"...last week my granddaughter had a flyer in her folder for dance and music classes at AMR Army. And so, of course, I wanted to sign her up and they said, oh, no, you cannot do that. I have a general power of attorney...but the Army wants court decree that I have temporary guardianship, which is a bit far out there in my opinion to sign up for music and dance lesson. And so we could not partake in that program...so she misses out because we don't have a court decree and my daughter is deployed and cannot sign her up personally. That would have been the other option, and I explained that and they said, no, this is the way the Army does it so."

"There's so many that are left, you know, without a parent because they deployed parents at the same time. Sometimes some parents choose to both go at the same time to get it over with so the children go through less trauma. It just depends, but the grandparents typically or a family member are out there left and a lot of the times they're not connected to the military so they don't know where to go to access any kind of service even like just minimal services or what's out there."

"...the dual military or the single soldiers those kids are left without a parent. And...they are probably with a grandparent or, you know, family care plan provider so there's no resources, you know, at least if there's a parent, you can counsel them, but then the ones that are without a parent it's harder, it's hard on them."

3. Educational Issues. For many participants, the education of military children seemed to be an important topic. Relocating (or “PCS-ing”) is a familiar concept to many military families, including many of the participants. What it has meant for many of those with children, according to various participants, is a loss of control over where their children attend school as well as loss of control over the quality of education their children receive. They reported being at the mercy of the state. Participants in some locations raised concerns over the quality of the state's education, overcrowded classrooms, and teachers who were uninformed about the struggles of military youth.

a. Lack of Quality of Public Education for Military Children. For some of the participants, local economic downturns have led to dramatic decreases in funding for public education.

"...So, why does my child have to suffer a poor education because I live [here]? Yes, we can send our child to a private school if we can afford it and that's the problem is they're not affordable for the majority of the military personnel who live here. So, what's the answer?"

"...where most of the military installations are, they go to crappy schools. I mean every base we've been to the school it was just very, very, very rare that the installation schools fed to good schools. They don't in my experience; they haven't fed to good schools. The only time you got a good school was if you had a DOD school so why not have a DOD school at every military installation to keep that continuity?"

"We're talking the kids in the classroom here are 25 to 30 kids per classroom, you know, and they're adding modular units as we speak and every month there's new teachers hired. It will come out in the newsletter saying we've hired two new second grade teachers and we've reshuffled the classrooms so now there's only 25 kids in each one...the programs available here on post aren't enough to supplement."

b. School Personnel Not Understanding Military Life. While there were participants who discussed positive interactions with school staff and teachers, others believed public schools needed to be better prepared for and more understanding of the unique circumstances and struggles of military children. The participants varied on whether educators were outright insensitive to their children's needs or if their needs were innocently overlooked. Either way, the common consensus was that schools which educate military populations need to become more familiar with the needs of military children.

"...when my daughter was having a hard time I went to her school and I told them that she is having a hard time because my husband had just deployed"

and they were very close. They didn't care. I was standing there I'm like 'do you have a counselor?' They were like, 'oh, they were too busy.' They didn't even pay attention to what I was saying...they were asking me questions like 'well why did your daughter miss an extra three days of school?' 'Okay, well, didn't I just explain to you that my daughter had a very hard time?' 'Well, she needs to come to school.' They didn't really care so, yeah, I was very upset."

"In the school setting...they don't have the counseling, like the counselor doesn't have, they know about military, but they don't have the strategies or I don't know techniques of having group type, I don't know, like therapy with the students...They think that, okay, well, your parent is deployed and, you know, just kind of not really suck it up but they don't see the difference."

V. Special Populations

Summary:

This section highlights issues unique to specific sub-populations of the military. These sub-populations include Individual Augmentees, Dual Military Couples and those affiliated with the Exceptional Family Member Program.

1. Individual Augmentees (IAs). Issues related to the IA experiences were evident for both the IA and his/her family. IAs talked about difficulty in integrating into a new unit for deployment (not the one they have trained with) and then in reintegrating back into their old unit upon return from deployment. IAs spoke about the difficulty in accepting or being accepted and trusted by those service members in another unit when he/she does not have the training history with that unit. They spoke of not feeling supported by their own command upon return—of not being asked how they were, or what they had done while they were away from their primary unit. They talked about feeling like an "outsider" as an IA in a new unit AND as an outsider in their own unit when they returned. Some reported frustration and anger around being forced to serve in a service other than the one they recruited with (e.g. Navy IA to Army).

Family members spoke of not being contacted or even knowing where to go for support because their service member was no longer a part of the same unit. They spoke of being "dropped" by FRGs because their spouse was no longer part of the supported unit (e.g. the unit was not deployed even though one of its members went IA).

"I felt like an outsider, and I still do in my command because everybody while I was gone formed their little inner circle and I'm on the outside of the circle going, hey, what's going on, what's going on, you know? And that's hard to deal with."

"...Like in my case they [the receiving unit] didn't know what I was like before I went on deployment so they didn't know what I was like when I came back and I was trying extremely hard to be that same type of person. I came back, you know, and was just digging a hole deeper and deeper and deeper, you know? So you're fighting hard to get out of depression or whatever and you're just sinking back in, but nobody in the command knew what I was like really before so they couldn't really pickup a subtle hint for, hey, there's something going on. 'Why is he doing this? Why is he doing that?'...So, you kind of fall through the cracks sometimes."

"I got back and no one [in my unit] even asked what I did. It was like, hey, I got back on a Friday and checked in on my command on a Monday and I said 'I would like to take leave.' They're like, 'okay,' you know. So I fill out the

paperwork for a leave chip and I met with the captain for the first time. He was like, 'hey, great welcome back, I'll see you when you come back off of leave and we'll talk.' Never did...It slipped his mind, he forgot, you know, I went on leave, came back, you know, and so there was nothing there."

"The problem is, if the Navy is involved, the Navy does a great job, the IA program is an Army thing and they do not have it going on at all. They do not take care of us. The biggest problem is, the Navy, you are out of the Navy's reach, and you are in the Army's and the Army's is jacked up. Okay...Badly! And I've been in Iraq, where guys have been there for 2 years and guys don't have a clue when they are coming home, they have been extended two and three times, they are ready to eat their gun and that's the problem. If the Navy takes ownership, they will take care of it, I've seen that, but the IA's, they are left to hang out to dry."

2. Dual Military Couples. Some participants spoke of themselves as being part of a "dual military couple" such that both they and their spouse were service members. These participants spoke of the difficulty they feel in accessing support services. Unique barriers mentioned by Active Duty spouses included: (1) the misperception that because they are Active Duty, they do not need the support services as much as more traditional spouses because they (the service member spouse) should already "get it;" and (2) the times the supports are offered conflict with their duty day. These active duty spouses lamented the fact that the military has been slow to adapt to meet the needs of those with multiple roles (i.e. service member, spouse, parent, etc).

"Everything is for military man, civilian woman and when you try to do, you know, both of us being mil, we're dual military so anything you see on base it's geared toward that typical family where one person is a civilian and so if you've got mil to mil then it's just, you're not going to get off....The odds of me getting off work at four thirty, ha, ha-ha. That's funny. I would love to see four thirty. I don't know what four thirty looks like. I know what my office looks like, but everything is geared towards one active duty member and one dependent and there's a very high number of dual military that are just completely being ignored because they're not the majority and it's annoying at the very least, but I would have to say I'm offended. I think it's ridiculous because to, even a civilian like my mom and I were talking about it the other day and in the civilian community it's easier to accomplish what you need to accomplish if you're husband is in the military than it is to do so if you're active duty. Like you, it's easier to do it if you're a civilian and that's just kind of sad, you know, like we're in a military community things should be easier because we're in a military community and everybody should understand that."

"The way I look at it at least is if anybody should understand, it should be the military community, and I hear it at work all the time and it kills me because

people say, well, my husband is deployed right now and they'll say, well, that shouldn't be that hard on you because you should get it. Actually just yesterday my husband's flight got delayed-- he's supposed to be coming home...but his flight got delayed a couple of days and I had my shop chief look at me and say, 'well, that really sucks for him, you'll live, that's fine. I don't feel sorry for you, but I feel really bad for him.' And I kind of asked him I was like so, you know, one, why would you say that? And, two, like where did that come from? And I think the attitude in the military community is if you are an active duty member, you do not count as a spouse. You just don't. And he said something about, 'well, you knew that this could happen so I don't understand why you're upset about it.'...The attitude is, well, you're a military member so you don't need it [supports]. You don't need to go to deployed spouses dinners, you don't need to go to a deployed spouse support group because what do you have to say? You should get it because you're in the military."

3. Exceptional Family Members. It must be noted that the vast majority of responses related to the Exceptional Family Member Program (EMFP) were via the electronic survey rather than in the focus groups. That being said, a total of 91 participants communicated in their responses that their families were special needs families. Issues raised by these participants revolved around: (1) access and outreach; (2) gaps in coverage and availability; (3) isolation; and (4) support.

a. Access and Outreach. Many of these participants reported challenges in accessing services. Participants reported that they lacked a military advocate to help them navigate the system in their quest to establish services for their special needs family member. They lamented that information about available services was not more readily available and centralized. They expressed disappointment over what they viewed as incompetence in the service providers and case managers they encountered. Rather than feeling unburdened by these individuals and organizations, they reported feeling as though they had to take the initiative to educate providers and case managers on special needs. They reported a desire for providers in the military and the community to reach out to them.

One of the biggest challenges reported by these participants was maintaining services for their families after relocating. Many reported that changing duty stations meant having to start over in terms of establishing services, and reported receiving little help during this time. Participants expressed that this discontinuity of services and providers was very harmful to their special needs family member(s). In general, participants expressed frustration over the amount of time and effort, and number of "hurdles" they had to jump through in order to begin receiving services for their families. These participants reported wait lists for certain programs that were years long, and that eligibility and availability of services varied from state to state.

Participants also reported aggravation due to having to drive great distances in order to access services. Finally, participants reported that finances restricted their access to services when services were not covered.

"There are several problems with the resources in the military. First of all, they are not advertised enough, so you have to dig to find them. Then they are not centralized meaning you have to go to several different offices to get the information. Usually there is personnel that is not knowledgeable. There is too much red tape and paperwork and the process takes too long. And there is no forum for parents who have found useful resources to share this with other parents. I have found that there are several listserv groups of military families that are the most useful source of information."

"I would like to see the boys in neurologic music therapy on a weekly basis (the recommendation from the NMT clinic). But there are no local providers, the closest NMT is over 75 miles away, and the clinic I prefer is over 200 miles away. The state would pay for this service if it was provided after school hours. Because of the distance, number of clients, and time factors, we paid out of pocket for a year before scheduling accommodated the state paying for the therapy. The out of pocket expense for this weekly therapy appointment, including transportation, food, and the therapy, exceeded \$1200 per month. Unfortunately, the financial burden proved too much, our house was in foreclosure, our van was repossessed, and even over a year later, we are still paying off bills that we incurred while the boys received this VITAL therapy... Did I mention my husband has been in Korea for 2 years? he does come home this week, but he won't be stationed locally, and will only be home on weekends, maybe. And his new unit will deploy in the next 9 months, most likely to Afghanistan. I would really like to be able to access the EFMP respite program. However, the time and paperwork needed to enroll the family is very cumbersome and frankly, I just don't have the energy to make that many more appointments with doctors, EFMP personnel, and fill out the stacks of paperwork."

"It is a battle to get any kind of services for these children. I can't afford the resources that could help."

b. Gaps in Coverage and Availability. These participants reported that their insurance did not cover the therapies and other services recommended for their special needs family members by providers and research. Participants reported that gaps occurred in the types of therapies covered and in yearly spending limits for certain therapies. In particular, a large number of participants were frustrated with what they felt was a lack of adequate coverage for Applied Behavior Analysis Therapy (ABA). Many participants also reported dismay and a feeling of unfairness over their realization that their military coverage would end when the service

member retired. Participants reported seeking coverage from multiple sources, including the military, state, churches, and charities. Despite these various sources of funding, participants still reported experiencing financial difficulties and paying out of pocket for services that were not covered. The services that these participants reported receiving were described as being essential to the well-being of their special needs family member. Participants reported desiring additional services in addition to more inclusive coverage. Specifically, more support, better school programs, and recreational activities for special needs children were requested.

"We always thought if we did over 20 years that our children would have full medical coverage--but we do not. Her therapy needs will be completely uncovered when he retires, likely forcing us to use his entire retirement check each month for her services. Feels like an unkept promise--I guess he missed the 'fine print' at the recruiter's office?"

"The dollar cap on ECHO's ABA benefits is the ONLY thing preventing our son from getting the treatment that he needs. Instead of being able to focus on making my child well again and making sure that my husband is combat ready and in good spirits, we spend the majority of our time fighting the state for services that do not exist anymore for military children, fighting to keep financially stable (we're in a considerable amount of debt and sometimes have to stand in free food lines on the weekends as a result of having to pay for extra therapies and treatments for our son's autism), and struggling to keep our family and our marriage intact. The state of California is nearly bankrupt, and NO resources exist anymore for military families. We do not choose where we are stationed, therefore, we should have a MILITARY standard of care that is more than adequate to take care of these children's needs, instead of relying upon our state of residence to pick up the tab, when in most cases, the state is both unable and unwilling to do so for military families."

c. Isolation. Participants frequently mentioned feeling isolated and misunderstood. They reported not feeling supported by organizations or case workers, especially those affiliated with the military.

"Schools need to give services to military families as required by law from the very beginning. Too many school districts know that military families do not stick around long enough to fight for services for their special education students. This is wrong. We should not have to fight for our children's educational rights when our husbands are out fighting for our country. It would really help if we could move medicaid services from state to state without starting over."

"Respite care, provided on the local economy through Tricare... is ill suited for our needs, but we muddle our way through it... We are authorized civilian

provided therapies through Tricare, but don't utilize them due to the inability of the providers to perform care in our home. Our daughter is on life-support and is incredibly time/work intensive to move...My wife see's civilian therapists for depression issues surrounding our case (amplified tremendously by the lack of support we've received from EFMP/or from our chain of command). Both my wife and are seeing a civilian marriage counselor due to the strain this has placed on the family. My wife seeks emotional support by networking with other similar parents online. We/She gets absolutely NO support from our local military community. We PCS'd to our new location, airlifted our daughter to a new hospital, closed on a moved into a new home, brought our daughter home for the first time after a 16 month NICU/PICU stay (since birth) while on life support, and gave birth to our second daughter, ALL WITHIN A TWO WEEK PERIOD. No one from my new unit was aware we were coming, or that we had significant family issues. No one from my chain of command visited the family while we were hospitalized. No one from my chain of command has visited the home since we've brought our daughter home to see how we live and our particular challenges. We receive NO support (formal or informal) from any Air Force entity. We currently do not have family in the local area, nor a friend support network, nor an AF support network..."

d. Support. Participants reported needing and greatly benefiting from programs which provide them with support. Of particular value were respite programs, which participants said provided them with time to run errands, time to themselves, or time to spend with their spouse. Support in general was reported as essential for the service member's ability to perform their duties to the best of their ability. Participants also named support groups as highly valuable for providing them with emotional support, family activities, and opportunities to exchange knowledge with other special needs families.

"The respite programs allows me some free time as my husband was deployed for 10 months and we have lived apart for two years for the benefit of my two special needs, so they could have continuity of care. The other is the ECHO program which has afforded us ABA hours which is essential in the treatment of Autism."

"Actually, I have found more emotional support and knowledgeable people in the civilian community willing to assist my husband and me in finding appropriate programs for financial aid than any government representative for the military has even attempted to offer us. Those of us in the military who have children affected by autism have begun to band together, to help one another try and make up for what the military has failed to provide our children with. We all struggle. We all hurt. We all fight for our children's treatment, and none of us can understand why the military does not do more to help our children."

"At this point I have become the advocate in the Community and really just forced to do it for my family and many other Military families. I created the Military Special Families Support group.....It is going well and helping many Military parents in this community as well as the EFMP dept is involved because I started it. What I fear is when we transfer and what will the families have after that happens. I provide many things from medical to the recreational and the educational parts to what families need. Some of the community organizations may not have the up-to-date information on what benefits are for the Military."

VI. Recommendations from the Field

Summary:

Throughout the listening sessions, participants made suggestions for what could be done to improve supports for military service members and their families. In many cases, they were quick to offer advice for how to "fix" issues that had been identified during the session. In general their recommendations focused on ensuring consistency and predictability across installations and service branches.

Key Areas:

1. Informal Support Building as Prevention. Participants recommended that support building among spouses and families should be an on-going endeavor, not just something that happens during a deployment. Their comments highlighted the need for a preventative rather than a reactionary approach to building and maintaining networks of support.

"But again, like I said before, it would be great if we just had more of a publicity or thing to get this information out there that, hey you've got these programs available and use them as a preventative measure instead of a reactive measure because I'm telling you, most of the time we are not going to seek out these services until it is absolutely needed or we are in a situation that we do need it and we're not going to use it as a preventative measure because we don't know about it until we start looking for it."

"... I feel like we know another deployment is going to happen, it's inevitable, and I'm really big on building that support network now as opposed to waiting because I think what happens a lot of times...they[the FRO] decided to wait until the deployment starts or is about to start and they start doing all the functions and wanting all the wives to meet each other and become friends, and I think that should be going on constantly and especially with the military coming and going. We have so many spouses that are new who weren't here for the last deployment and we know another one is going to be coming up on the horizon, now is a time for us to get together and that doesn't seem to be the issue. It's like, well, we're not in deployment so we're not going to be as focused on that, and I feel like it's great having Military OneSource and a lot of these base services, but I think there's nothing better than having that friend who you can cry on their shoulder when you need, when you don't know what services are out there being able to go and ask them and they share their experiences or if you're in a pinch for childcare having someone to watch while you go to the doctor or whatever. So, I think that's really important and I don't think that happens a lot. I don't think that network, that networking is really going on."

"When you said things continue to evolve, I've done two deployments back-to-back-to-back with the same battalion, with the same people, my friends from deployment one to deployment two are completely different because they PCS. They moved. They did everything. So when you have that six-month gap it's like you go six months, seven months for us and you become so close with these girls and some of them have to PCS and then there's no social functions, no meeting the other spouses for six months. When you go right back into deployment, you meet new spouses again and it's like you have to start the process all over again. At the first function it's all new faces because they change out, you know, people come and go so frequently. So, that is a really good point doing things during non-deployment time whether you're scheduled to deploy or not because non-deployable time sometimes are just as stressful for sure."

2. Support from Command. Many participants spoke of the importance of command support for encouraging use of any type of support service or program. Three major themes in these responses were evident:

a. Commander Initiated Contact: "Invasive Leadership". Participants suggested that they might be more willing to talk to their commander if the interaction was initiated by the commander. Some participants said they thought that it was the commands job to *personally* get to know each service member. Participants suggested that if this were more the case, commanders would be better able to recognize if and when a service member needs to seek additional supports.

"It's difficult for me. It was hard enough for me to come over here and talk to a person, but you know, they always say, yeah, you're welcome to come on in, come on in and, you know, I don't think it's so much that way. It would be better if, you know, if you came back and your command was like, okay, you've been back now, hey, you know, why don't you come to my office, you know, let's talk. If I was invited in maybe to talk about some things, I probably would have felt more comfortable than me, you know, going to that person and trying to push myself on them."

"I think some things like that to kind of maybe like focus groups you bring in a bunch of old salt sailors who have been in for a while and a bunch of young guys who have been in for a while and just, hey, kind of talk, throw back ideas and say, you know, if this is said to you like this, what do you think when that is said to you? You might be like, wow, really. I never meant it to be like that, but that's how that person is perceiving it and you don't know because they're not going to tell you because you're more senior than them you're never going to get that feedback unless you solicit for it, you know, try to get feedback from the E1 to E3 or whatever on, you know, how do they really think, you know, what's going through their mind? And maybe like push their little buzz word, what was it the last time it's been the invasive

leadership, you know, they want you to get in there and find out what your sailor is doing to be invasive. Find out where he's going on the weekend and what he's doing, you know, this, this and that, you know. I'm like, okay, that can work to a point, but that can also push people away."

b. Training for Commanders. Many participants voiced the opinion that it is the chain of command's job to inform the services members about the support programs and services available to them. In order for the commanders to be able to do this, participants stated that commanders needed to be trained and given the information themselves about what is available.

"We should be empowering NCO's, and not by empowering NCO's by telling them "Go do this", you know, take your NCO's for a day and go over to the Family Readiness Center. Just go over there. You know, this is this office, this is Jennifer, this is Brian, this is Tom, personally talk with these people, find out what they have, find out how they connect with you and then you need to be able to explain that to your Marines. And you be me, next week. Take your Marines and bring them down here. Show them what we've got because if we don't know and it's right in front of our face and we're missing it that is because we are not looking. I am telling you it is out there so you need to go look. You have to make time for those types of things. Um, so I would say that if I was in charge for a day and what I plan to do is some version of that...so we will see what happens. Hopefully that will be effective."

"I think we need to really incorporate, you know, maybe a day-long class for up and coming officers and enlisted, you know, at different levels what the Fleet and Family is. In the Navy, it's usually the second class and first class petty officers are what we consider to be the front line supervisors, the person working with, you know, Senior Seaman Smith over here who might have an issue. That first class probably has no clue. That first class is the one that should know and when they get promoted and become chiefs and master chiefs, then you go. Same thing with officers. The division officer level, which is (inaudible) and lieutenant JG's, they don't know. They're learning. I mean they're getting, you know, fed a whole dump truck of water through a straw right now, but they need to have something specific more than, okay, 30 minutes during some sort of leadership training that this is the Fleet and Family Support Center, but as soon as they get to their ship or unit somebody says, oh, those people, they're worthless. So, we need to have something mandatory because if it's not mandatory, the ships aren't going to send the people."

c. Top Down Messages and "Orders". Participants stated that if their commander told them about available programs and supports and were "ordered" to use them, they would do so. This "endorsement" by their commander was perceived to reduce stigma. Participants stated that they thought they were getting a great deal of "lip

service" from their chain of command about the importance of utilizing the military support programs and services but that they doubted the sincerity of the message.

"I think a big catalyst that would make all this come together if we got top down message that if, hey, if we want to take advantage of some of your programs, especially when it comes to some of the mental health, counseling services, that it stays confidential and there aren't going to be any repercussions from taking advantage of these services and all of sudden it gets back to your command and all of a sudden you find yourself in a situation that you don't want to be in. I mean if there was that top down assurance, I mean if your CO comes out and tells you if you take care of or advantage of this, it's all going to stay confidential and there aren't going to be any repercussions, you know, that is going to impact your career."

"So, you kind of fall through the cracks sometimes. I think a lot of it is timing, but if you were, you know, in my case if my, you know, command would have said there's something kind of going on, you know what, go over and see somebody. If it would have been kind of like an order, but really not because they said they can't order you, but if it would have come like ..."Hey, go see somebody", I would have been, oh, okay and would have just done it and not said, well, you can't make me, you kind of, you know, you're trained to go, okay, and then you probably would have, you know, I probably would have."

"Now luckily for us with the Marine Corps, we can, I can put a NCO with a del dog or I can put a Staff NCO with an NCO and say we're making a phone call and you are going to this appointment. And I'm going to force you to go over there and do it. I'm going to supervise the day light out of this thing and it's going to happen and you are going to give good answers. And then that Marine will kick and scream the entire way, but he is going to do it because you told him to do it and then on the back end, hopefully it's, "Do you see why that was important? And do you see why I had to handle it?" There is a teaching moment there. Um, but sometimes that is the way it has got to be. Now that's easy for me to do or for leaders to do but it is not easy for a husband to tell his wife this is what we are doing."

3. Accommodation and Customer Service. While some participants spoke of their frustration as to when conferences, briefings, and programs were scheduled, others praised the services for being more flexible in their offerings by also scheduling events during lunch time or after work hours to help accommodate more spouses and families.

"...I think if we had someone like an Ombudsman contacting each and every single spouse, let it start with the spouse, I think that way the communication would be so much better and everybody would be more informed. Once these guys leave, that's it, no more time to inform anybody of anything, they're gone. Let's get on the next unit that is deploying and that's the perception

that I get from the folks that are in charge of the units. They're gone. That's not my problem anymore. So if we had someone who works with the spouses I think it would help tremendously and it would make these guys feel a lot better to know, that okay, Tri-Care is established, great, if Susie falls down and breaks her leg, it's covered. Or, in your case, if your spouse or your family member had contacted Red Cross, you would have found out within 24 hours about your family incident."

4. Better Marketing of Programs. Many participants reported that they are not accessing supports simply because they are not aware of them. Many participants expressed the need for an individual within the military to make personal contact with each military family to tell them about the programs and services that are available through the military. Their responses suggested the desire for more "personalized" programs. Of note is that Navy participants frequently cited their Ombudsman as doing just that for them.

"...my husband just came off of a transition team, which is similar to the individual augmentee and while it's getting better than it was, the support system is not what it needs to be because you have a lot of even younger officers on those teams and those spouses have no clue what to do and that was our third deployment so I was, I knew where to find the resources because I stayed in the community we were in, but my FRG wrote me off because he PCS'd to Kuwait and they just wrote me off saying, oh, we're not deployed so we figured you didn't want to be here. That's great, thanks. Without ACS and the volunteer work I do there I would have had no connection to the post at all because it wasn't until the last couple months of that deployment that they started saying, oh, wow, there's a lot of you guys here; we need to do something and, yeah, I would go to their meetings, but there was over 400 transition team or individual augmentee spouses at [installation] and only maybe 10, 15 would show up to the meetings because word didn't go out because how would it if they're not connected to the post? And that's the other thing with, that I'm noticing now as our FRG leader here that we get just this flood of information. I get something like 10 emails a day from my FRSA and it's not always something that I'm interested in or the people I'm sending it out to are interested in, but and then the stuff we are interested in isn't coming out or is coming out combined with five other things. So, it's just the information network while it's working, it could be better."

"To caveat on that as well and just kind of consolidate it because we are very compartmentalized and I find and, you know, in taking off my spouse hat and putting on the employee hat, too, I find there are a lot of different groups, organizations, out there doing very similar kinds of things and, gee, you know, getting through it all and figuring out what's important to me and what's, you know, not applicable to me but then we're pushed to push information out and it's just a really, you know, vicious cycle because on the

one hand even, you know, for my program I hear, oh, we're not getting this, this information doesn't get down, you know, to the families where it's needed, but on the other hand I hear there's so much information coming down that, you know, stuff gets lost in the bulk of it. I don't have an answer, but it's I think overwhelming for all of us."

"The first thing I'd do is get on the Family Readiness Officers. I know that it's a lot for one person to handle so try to find some kind of funds to get two of them, but, you know, make sure you keep them on their toes as far as telling all the families, telling us about the, you know, all the resources that are out there because they know, they know everything that's going on, off and on base and if they don't, they're supposed to. So that's the first thing is getting that, getting them to push them to send that information out there, you know, be a little bit more social with the family members especially when the active duty person is deployed, you know, a lot of times I think that those people they kind of say, well, he's deployed, I don't need to do this or that. That's the way I look at it."

"Just caveating off that I mean as great as the Blue Star Card and MWR are as a whole, the only thing I think that hold them back from having the success that they could have is that their marketing department is horrible. As much as they work to create these great programs, they don't put the same effort into marketing them and we get even with us hunting it down like having to physically call their office and get the information, we still sometimes will miss the boat on something and we'll find out after the fact that this was going on or they just put out, like they put it out sporadically like their soft push will be a little bit too soft and they won't tell you like where it is or what time it is and then it'll be like the week before, whoops, here it is and like at the last minute give the details and then by that time it's too late because our families have already planned, you know, activities for those days and times. So, I think if equal effort went into planning that goes into marketing, then they would have much, much more success than they do especially on this post because there's so many different agencies that offer great programs, and I think everybody is competing with each other and it's, that's part of the program as well...The marketing could be much, much better."

5. Mandated Inclusion of Spouses. Several service member participants suggested that the military should have mandatory information sessions for service member's spouses and family members during in-processing. These service members reported that spouses and other family members need to be educated about resources that are available to assist them. They acknowledged the difficulty in mandating anything for spouses and family members because they are not in the service. Nevertheless, participants stated that the end result of mandatory information sessions would be the prevention of problems that could have been avoided.

"So, I wish there were some way that they could, I hate to say force or make it mandatory on a wife because she's not in the service, but yet he needs to be bringing her in at least for indoctrination or something on the boat so she learns about OPSEC and the resources available to her and things like that before they've been married five years so."

"...It should be almost mandatory for your family to come out here and sit through this financial course, sit through the OneSource course, just to, you know, let them know, what's, you know. They do it for us but I don't think, sometimes you don't get your family involved in the whole thing because you are already under a little stress because you are getting ready to go. I think it should be almost mandatory for the family to come and sit with you during the whole process and mobilization and getting ready."

6. Encouragement of Self-Initiative. Several participants voiced frustration with the "welfare" mindset of some service members and families. Service members and their family need to cooperate with and/or work with the military. Spouses of service members reported that they do hear about programs and services that are available, *but* the service member does not take the initiative to make sure their FRO or Ombudsman has their spouses contact information. Participants stated that the military can only be expected to do so much and that the service member and their family members need to work *with* the military to help the military provide for their family members. Participants stated that spouses also need to take the initiative to update their contact information.

"...before we had our Family Readiness Officer we were one of the last units to get our FRO and so we still had KV's and I was one of the KV's and it was like pulling teeth to get active duty Marines to give their wife's email address up. You would think we were asking for their first-born child, and I think that attitude has not changed with the FRO's coming on board so I know because I still am in really close contact with our FRO we have spouses of deployed Marines; we have no way to contact them. I mean short of their Marine getting injured or dying and us cracking their emergency contact information, we have no way to get a hold of their spouse and the spouse cannot come to the FRO and say here's my email. It has to come from the Marine and that's an issue."

"...That, you know, I can't tell you how many people don't update their information. We're told every month to update our information. And it's only as good as the person that puts it in the system. So, I mean, I can't call and check on his wife and kids or give her a number, and then it's been disconnected. I called a number the other day, and it was disconnected, but yet you have it out there advertised."

"We have to be very proactive. We just moved here in June of 2008, but every time I met people, every time it was getting out phone numbers, go

and get involved, know what's going on with you, you know, really pushing other people to become involved. I was part of the FRG and I was a key caller so my job was to call and give information to families and keep them up-to-date, but it is hard to get people involved and everything you learn you just kind of put away and when somebody else comes up with a problem similar at least you kind of know where to go, but it's a learning process."

APPENDIX

Military Family Needs Assessment

Topic Areas

- A. Where do you get information about resources available to support you and your family?
 - 1. When you need information or help outside your friends/family where do you go?
- B. What programs/services are you (your spouse; children) currently using? Are they provided by the military? By your community? Online?
 - 1. How are these programs/services useful to you and/or your family?
 - 2. Which of these programs are most valuable to you and/or your family?
- C. What is missing and/or could be improved about these programs/services? From the military? By your community? What barriers exist to accessing resources?
 - 1. What needs do you have that are not being met by the military? By your community?
 - 2. What, if any, limits your ability to access resources in your community? In the military?
 - 3. What could civilian communities do better to support military families?
- D. What has been your experience with Military OneSource?
- E. If you were in charge for a day, what would you do to help military families like yours in terms of programs and services?
- F. What are the challenges that your children face? Are you aware of resources that can help, either in your community or in the military?

Demographic Questions

1. Are you the Service Member or spouse?:

Service Member Spouse of Service Member

2. Gender:

Female Male

3. Age: _____

4. Race/Ethnicity:

Caucasian/White
 African American
 Hispanic
 Asian/Pacific Islander
 Other (please specify): _____

5. Marital or relationship status:

Single
 Living together in committed relationship (not married)
 Married
 Separated
 Divorced (not remarried)
 Widowed (not remarried)

6. How many years have you been with your spouse/partner? _____

7. Number of child/children: _____

8. Age of Children: _____

9. Where does your family live?

On installation Off installation Within 30 minute drive of installation

10. Service Member's present pay grade (please check one):

- E1-E4 (Junior Enlisted)
- E5-E9 (Senior Enlisted)
- W1-W5 (Warrant Officer)
- O1-O3 (Junior Officer)
- O4 or above (Senior Officer)
- Don't Know

11. What is your highest level of education?

- Grade school
- Some high school
- High school grad (or GED)
- Trade/vocational school after high school
- Some college
- Completed community college/two-year degree
- Four year college/university graduate
- Graduate school/professional school

12. Military service branch: _____

13. Number of deployments (since 2001): _____

14. Current deployment status:

- Pre-deployment
- Currently deployed
- Post-deployment/Reunion
- Never been deployed