

Isolation Hits Military Spouses During COVID-19 Pandemic

A mental health care provider surveyed military spouses to learn how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting their lives.

BY DAVE SPIVA

Most military spouses are suffering from mental health issues brought on by COVID-19, according to a mental health care survey.

In November last year, Thrive Talk, a platform that provides online appointments with therapists, contacted 197 military spouses from all services of the military. Researchers found that about 84 percent had “increased feelings of isolation” since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Of those contacted, 23 percent said they had “reached out for mental health support” during the pandemic, according to a Thrive Talk report titled: *We can no longer ignore the mental health of our military spouses*.

Thrive Talk found that 53 percent of military spouses suffer from isolation due to the pandemic. Almost 55 percent also said that military training and deployment schedules have been impacted during the pandemic.

The survey shows that two-thirds of spouses believe their emotions are “forgotten” or “ignored” by the military.

“The majority of spouses stated that the military was either not responding appropriately to COVID-19 or was only prioritizing the safety of their enlisted partner,” the Thrive Talk report stated.

Nonprofit organizations such as the Association of Defense Communities and Blue Star Families have already predicted the mental health effects that the pandemic would have on military dependents. Polling data from the organizations show that 23 percent of their respondents from March 18 to June 2, 2020, who didn’t have pre-existing depression or anxiety disorders now have symptoms.

The report said the psychological effects of isolation due to the pandemic have caused “additional uncertainty” due to Department of Defense policies such as last year’s stop movement order. The circumstances of the pandemic are “exacerbating preexisting mental health challenges” of those who suffer from depression and anxiety, according to the report.

Another factor that could cause stress to military families is the loss of jobs due to the pandemic. According to an October Association of Defense Communities and Blue Star Families report, the military spouses’ unemployment rate was 24 percent before the pandemic and has “likely increased” to 30 percent. ★

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10 TAKEAWAYS FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In an October report from the Association of Defense Communities and Blue Star Families, the organizations stated 10 instances of how the pandemic has affected and is continuing to affect the military community:

1. Military and veteran families reported increased stress and incidence of mental health symptoms.
2. Unemployment increased among veterans and military spouses.
3. Like their civilian counterparts, female service members and military spouses faced greater child care challenges than their male colleagues.
4. National Guard and active-duty service members and families experienced and continue to experience the pandemic differently.
5. Pre-existing concerns regarding gaps in military children’s education have been exacerbated by school restrictions and closures.
6. Military and veteran families experienced disruptions to their health and mental health care, which contributed to an increasing backlog of care needs.
7. Military services and installations differed and continue to differ in precautions, interpretation of guidance and policies.
8. Despite increased availability of telehealth services, stigma continues to deter military family members from seeking mental health care.
9. Caregivers faced increased responsibility with less support.
10. Military spouses are teleworking at lower rates than service members, veterans or Department of Defense civilians.

Source: COVID-19 Military Support Initiative by the association of Defense Communities and Blue Star Families

MILITARY SPOUSES FEEL ISOLATED BY COVID

■ Positive % response ■ Negative % response ■ Indifferent % response

How do you feel about the way society usually treats military spouses?



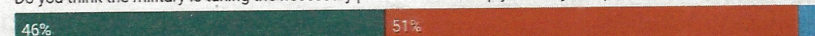
Do you feel even more isolated from friends and family because of local/federal restrictions?



Do you feel that the pandemic has highlighted the everyday challenges of being a military spouse to those not in the military?



Do you think the military is taking the necessary precautions to keep you and your spouse safe?



Has the pandemic changed the way you or your spouse feels about remaining in the military?



SOURCE: THRIVE TALK