

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *2002 Survey of Spouses of Activated National Guard and Reserve Component Members* was commissioned by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs (OASD/RA) and Caliber Associates was awarded the contract to conduct the survey. Respondents were queried from August through November 2002 via a mailed survey instrument. Of the 7,658 surveys mailed out, 4,002 spouses responded, which was a 56.2% response rate. The survey was a valuable tool in taking the pulse of key family members. Moreover, the survey was conducted at an ideal time (the post September 11 period) and sampled the spouses of service members who were on both scheduled and unscheduled activations. This Executive Summary encapsulates the key information gained by the survey.

Project Overview and Methodology. The 2002 Survey is a follow up to the 1999 *Survey of Families of Deployed National Guard and Reserve Component Members*, and was conducted to gather data from spouses of Guard and Reserve members who had been activated since September 11, 2001. Information was collected to assist OASD/RA assess the status of family support programs and initiatives, as well as the needs of RC families. After pre-testing and editing, the final survey instrument comprised 57 multiple choice and one open-ended question (written comments). A random sample of 7,658 spouses were selected from a population of 29,673 representing all Reserve components except the Coast Guard Reserve. The sample was stratified by component and size of deployment (large or small deployment). Sample size was determined by calculating the number of surveys necessary to obtain 95% confidence, plus or minus 5%, for each cell, with an expectation of an overall 35% response rate. The survey response rate far exceeded expectations and indicated that spouses want their opinions known regarding family readiness issues.

Demographics. Six of the Reserve components were equitably represented by survey responses. All grades were also represented, but a higher percentage of senior enlisted (58.8%) and senior officers (17.4%) responded than was representative of the activated population. Similarly, 55% of respondents indicated the member had not been previously activated, which is not reflective of the entire activated population in which 70% had not been previously activated. Regarding employment, 75.8% said the member worked full time, 5.7% part time, 9.7% said the member was unemployed, and 8.7% were students. Marital data indicated that 67% of the marriages were over five years, while only 8.6% were under a year. Additional demographic information was collected on the children in the household and the length of time a family had resided in their community.

Pre-Activation Preparedness. Measuring spouses' perceived preparedness was a very important part of the survey, and numerous questions were asked to look at varying aspects of preparedness. Many spouses (over 60%) reported that they had two weeks or less notification prior to activation. While this seems a like a large amount of short-notice activations, it may not be all that surprising when recognizing the post September 11 environment. Pre-activation briefings and the mailing of information packets are usually viewed as useful ways of passing information to spouses, yet 43.4% reported they were unaware of a briefing and 33.1% reported they had not received any pre-activation materials. Spouses noted that their major task areas to be completed prior to activation were dependent care, legal, health, and financial tasks. On a positive note, 59.6% of spouses' employers were very supportive in allowing completion of pre-

activation tasks. The most interesting responses were spouses' evaluation of their own level of preparedness. While 29.3% said they were "neither prepared nor unprepared," and 33.7% said they were "unprepared" or "very unprepared," 37% said they were either "well prepared" or "very well prepared." Junior enlisted (E1 - E4) spouses married 5 years or less rated themselves less prepared than more senior personnel who had been married longer. Additionally, spouses with young children and spouses who had never experienced activation before tended to be less prepared.

Advance Notice of Activation. Focused analysis on advance notice of activation was broken down by component, grade (rank), length of marriage, mission location, and reported level of preparedness. Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard spouses reported the highest percentage of short-notice activation. This may be due to the short notice nature of the air component missions compared to other components that had previously scheduled missions (for example, an Army National Guard unit conducting a planned rotation to Bosnia). Surprisingly, senior enlisted (E5 and above) spouses reported the greatest percentage of short-notice activations – 47.6% under a week. Conversely, senior officers (O4 and above) reported only 26.7% as having less than a week notification. Length of marriage does not appear to have influenced notification time. Responses indicated that members who were activated and assigned to CONUS based missions actually had less notice of activation. This may be attributed to greater awareness of previously scheduled OCONUS deployments. With respect to reported level of preparedness, responses varied, but spouses who had a week or more notice of activation rated themselves higher in level of preparedness.

Post Activation Coping. A key question was asked on the spouse's ability to cope once the member was activated. Interestingly, the responses did not exactly mirror the self-reported level of preparedness. While 23.8% said they coped "neither poorly nor well," only 15.3% said they coped "poorly" or "very poorly," but 60.9% said they coped either "well" or "very well." Once again, more senior personnel and couples that had been married longer tended to report they had coped better than others. Another positive note is that 61.6% of spouses reported that the members' employers were supportive or very supportive. The ability to cope also tended to be higher for spouses who had lived in their community longer, indicating the value of support systems outside the military.

Income Fluctuations. Focused analysis on income fluctuations was conducted by component, and grade (rank). The data indicates that while 30.8% of the spouses reported income loss, 58% reported an increase in earnings. Spouses surveyed reported the following, by component: Army National Guard increase in income 65.3%, decrease in income 25.4%; Air National Guard increase 54.6%, decrease 32.4%; Army Reserve increase 55.5%, decrease 33.7%; Air Force Reserve increase 52.2%, decrease 34.4%; Naval Reserve increase 46.7%, decrease 40.4%; Marine Corps Reserve increase 53.8%; decrease 38.5%. In the breakout of income fluctuation by grade, all categories had more spouses reporting increases than decreases, although senior enlisted and senior officers had the greatest percentages of reported decreases in income. A profile of each grade (rank) group was done by amount of income change and cross-referenced against other factors. For example, 67.2% of junior enlisted spouses that reported an increase in income were experiencing their first activation. These profiles may be useful in examining various manpower issues, including retention.

Predicting Spouse Preparedness. Hierarchical linear regression analysis was conducted for both employed and unemployed spouses. Variables included demographic indicators, characteristics of activation, changes in home environment, and information received from the military. In both cases, significant predictors of being better prepared were more senior grade (rank), longer marriage, previous activation, spouse's military experience, older or no children, less tasks to do, and stable family income. Employed spouses had additional indicators of being more prepared if they required less time away from the job to complete required tasks prior to activation and if their employer was supportive of completing those required tasks.

Predicting Spouse Ability to Cope During Activation. Once again, hierarchical linear regression analysis was conducted for both employed and unemployed spouses. Significant predictors for employed spouses' greater ability to cope were more senior grade (rank), longer marriage, less tasks to complete, less time away from the job, and employer support. Significant predictors for unemployed spouses were more senior grade (rank), longer marriage, no children under 5, less tasks to complete, and utilization of support services.

Observations of Written Comments. The final question on the survey was open-ended and asked "What other family readiness issues are affecting you and your family and are not covered by this survey? Please explain them and what could be done to help Guard and Reserve families during activation." A total of 1685 written comments were reviewed and categorized. Respondents had opinions on everything from the status of their marriage to foreign policy recommendations. The greatest numbers of comments were on points of contact for unit support and general comments on family support services. Comments indicate that there are still many spouses and families that are not integrated into a family readiness network. Furthermore, responsibility for preparing families for activation falls upon the unit, the family readiness organization, the service member, and the spouse. Understanding the TRICARE system continues to be a challenge. Many comments were positive or indicated no problems. About 10% of the written comments were categorized as "general venting" where the respondent voiced opinions about numerous topics, many of which were unrelated to family readiness.

Summary of Issues

- Although support is strong for many units, all families are not being reached.
- Loss of income can be a factor during mobilization, but not all families suffer financial hardship. In fact, many families make more money during mobilization.
- There are "high risk" families that are more likely to need support, but may be the least likely to seek support. These families are newly married, with young children, and often isolated.
- Strong programs at the unit level are most effective.

Conclusions and Recommendations. **Building self-reliant families by arming them with the tools for success should continue to be the goal for Guard and Reserve family readiness programs.** Resources should be made available at the **unit level** in order to **establish the personal contact** that makes family readiness a reality. Programs should **identify "high risk" families** and work to address their needs prior to activation; in particular recently married families with children under five who lack military experience. Services and components should emphasize that units establish "ownership" of every family via their family readiness programs. Finally, **100% contact** with every spouse is a moving target, but a worthy goal for Reserve component family readiness programs.