



Military Family Food Insecurity

THE PROBLEM

Across the country, service members and their spouses are turning to food pantries for aid in feeding their families. This is neither an isolated problem nor a novel one. Military families are being served by food pantries on or near every single military base in the United States.¹



There were so many families of color on base [...] getting WIC or public assistance. I was blown away, blown away. People assume, 'you're in the military, you get a check [on] the 1st and the 15th, you must be doing okay.' [...] No. No.

- Black Military Spouse

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Food insecurity among military families is often triggered by many different factors, which include:

- Insufficient service member compensation among low-ranking enlistees,
- High rates of un/underemployment among military spouses,
- Limited availability and high costs of childcare
- Out-of-pocket housing and relocation expenses
- Challenges around activation and deployment, and
- Unexpected financial emergencies

Despite being food insecure, military families are barred from qualifying for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits because the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) is treated as income to determine eligibility.

¹ MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger. (2021). Leading the Charge to Remove Barriers for Military Families. <https://mazon.org/priorities/military-families>

*Unless otherwise noted, respondents indicated having at least one racial/ethnic identity other than white.

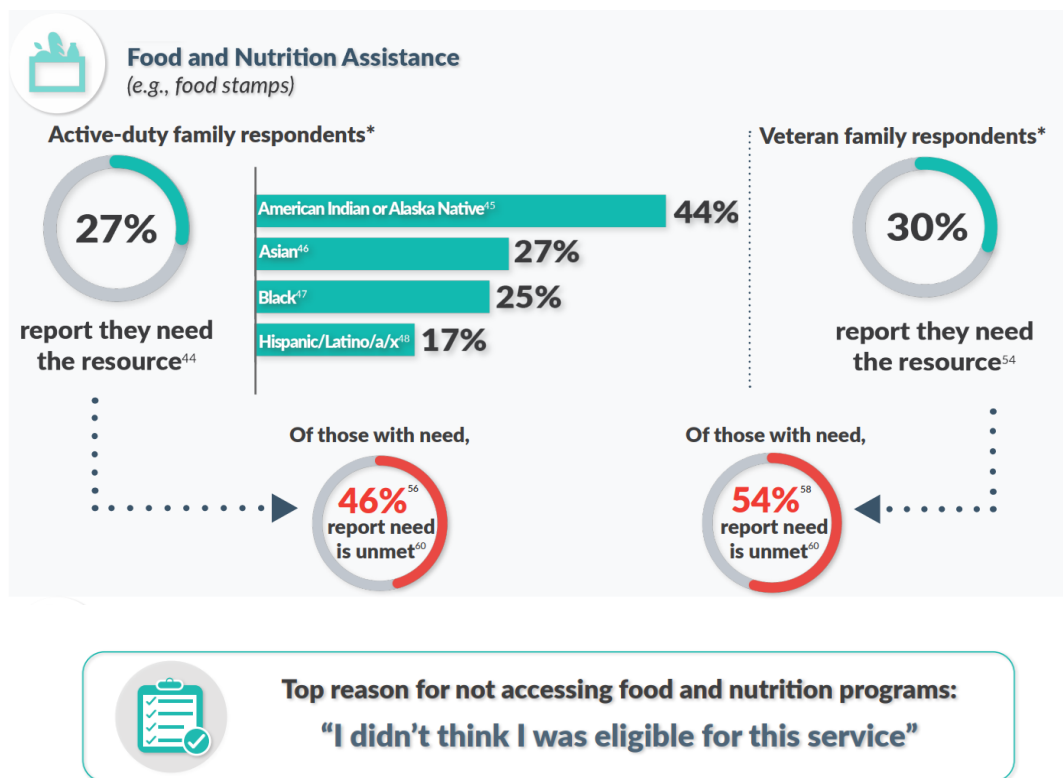
THE DATA

According to the 2020 Military Family Lifestyle survey,² some degree of food insecurity was found among all enlisted ranks, beyond junior enlisted families, and is intensified in families with a spouse who needs or wants to work but is not employed.

- **14% of enlisted active-duty** family respondents reported low or very low food security
- **10% of enlisted active-duty spouse** respondents who are employed (both full and part time) are food insecure, compared to 20% who are not working but need or want to work
- **5% of active-duty spouses** reported using a food pantry in the previous 12 months

Active-duty family respondents of color reported twice the level of food insecurity as their white, non-Hispanic counterparts.³

Active-duty and Veteran respondents* report similar levels of need for food and nutrition programs, but a greater proportion of Veterans report their needs unmet.



² Blue Star Families (2021). 2020 Military Family Lifestyle Survey Comprehensive Report. https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/BSF_MFLS_CompReport_FULL.pdf

³ Blue Star Families (2022). Blue star Families' Social Impact Research 2021: The Diverse Experiences of Military & Veteran Families of Color. Finding 6: Finances. https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/REI_Finding-6_Finances_Spotlight-6_Food-Insecurity.pdf

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