



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY CAREER ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

THIRD ANNUAL REPORT

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&

PEOPLE ANALYTICS,
OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE ARMY
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THIRD ANNUAL REPORT

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“My team reached out to DACES to help understand a data point regarding enlisted promotions system frustration. The DACES team presented an overview utilizing the leader dashboard which gave us the information we needed to re-think how we communicate and discuss our approach to enlisted promotions so that we could improve our customer service to Soldiers. The uses of DACES are endless. -BG Gregory S. Johnson, 63rd The Adjutant General of the Army

“Taking the DACES survey matters. The DACES dashboard enhancements provide the visualization ASLs need to understand the dynamic of Soldier sentiment.” Mr. Jeff Angers, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army (Military Personnel)

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

Abbreviation (Acronym)	Definition
AAG-RFL	Army Analytics Group, Research Facilitation Laboratory
AI/AN NH/PI	American Indian/Alaskan Native Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
ATMTF	Army Talent Management Task Force
CI	Confidence Interval
DACES	Department of the Army Career Engagement Survey
DMDC	Defense Manpower Data Center
<i>n</i>	Group size
OR	Odds Ratio
PCS	Permanent Change of Station
PDE	Person-Event Data Environment
SD	Standard Deviation

Executive Summary

The Department of the Army Career Engagement Survey (DACES) is designed to assess the retention intentions and sentiments of all Active Army Soldiers. In its first three years, over 134,000 DACES surveys have been completed, representing over 93,000 Active Army Soldiers. All analyses in this report were limited to consented surveys and performed in the Person-Event Data Environment Analysis Enclave, a secure Army data repository and analysis environment.

Key Findings

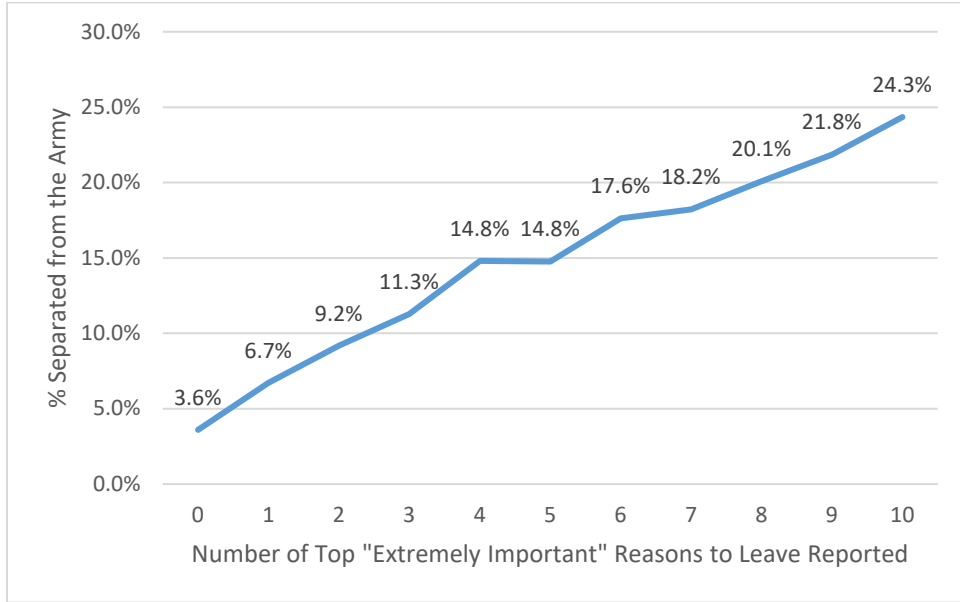
First, the top reasons to leave or stay in the Army were examined, both in the Overall DACES sample ($n = 72,107$), and within gender, marital status, and paygrade groups. Overall, five of the top six “Extremely Important” reasons to leave the Army center on family. Other top reasons to leave the Army include the predictability of Army life, the ability to influence or choose one’s duty station, the fairness of Army promotions, morale, and the flexibility to pursue one’s goals. Unique top concerns were identified within each of the demographic groups examined.

The opportunity to serve one’s country was the most frequently selected “Extremely Important” reason to stay in the Army, both in the overall sample and in every group examined. Unique top reasons to stay were observed among every group, except for unmarried Soldiers. Additionally, unmarried Soldiers less frequently identified “Extremely Important” reasons to stay in the Army, compared to married Soldiers.

Linking Army Sentiments to Attrition

A sample of 37,728 Active Army Soldiers who participated in the DACES Year 1 Birth Month campaign (May 6, 2020 through March 31, 2021) were followed until they separated from the Army or the end of the follow up window (October 31, 2022). Responses to the top ten “Extremely Important” reasons to leave the Army identified in the Key Findings section significantly predicted an increased odds of voluntarily separating from the Army over the next 30 months, even after adjusting for important demographic and Army characteristics. Flexibility to pursue one’s goals was the single strongest DACES top ten predictor examined, with more than a three-fold increase in risk of separating from the Army observed among those who identified “flexibility to pursue my goals” as an “Extremely Important” reason to leave the Army, compared to those who did not. Additionally, the number of top reasons a Soldier identified as “Extremely Important” reasons to leave the Army significantly predicted actual separation from the Army. Figure ES1 shows an unadjusted plot of the percentage of Soldiers who voluntarily separated from the Army, broken out by the number of top “Extremely Important” reasons to leave the Army identified. As Figure ES1 illustrates, the percentage of Soldiers who voluntarily separate from the Army more than doubles when two top reasons to leave are flagged as “Extremely Important,” and the percentage increases more than six-fold when all ten top reasons are flagged as is “Extremely Important.” This extends the evidence from the DACES Second Annual Report that DACES can be leveraged to identify the Soldier concerns that most strongly drive Soldiers to leave Army service.

Figure ES1. Linking Retention Sentiments to Actual Separation from the Army



Discussion

In its third year, the Army collected over 37,000 additional responses to DACES. Analyses in this report identified the top concerns amongst DACES respondents, unique concerns across gender, marital status, and paygrade groups, and revealed that the top ten reasons to leave (as identified on DACES) are sufficient to powerfully predict who will voluntarily separate from Army service over the next 30 months. Finally, this report highlights the importance of leveraging DACES findings to help inform both Army Senior Leaders who are making policy decisions and the broader Army community.

Introduction

In May 2020, the U.S. Army (hereafter, Army) launched the Department of the Army Career Engagement Survey (DACES), which was designed to assess Soldier retention intentions and sentiments. Unlike previous exit surveys, which only assessed Soldiers who were leaving the Army, DACES is emailed to all Active Army Soldiers to gain a better understanding of the sentiments of the Active Army force. More information about DACES, including the impetus for the survey, how privacy is protected, and findings from the first two years, can be found in the [DACES First Annual Report](#) (Vie, Trivette, and Lathrop, 2021) and the [DACES Second Annual Report](#) (Vie & Lathrop, 2022).

The present report has two main objectives: 1) Report the Top Ten “Extremely Important” Reasons to Leave and Stay in the Army, both for the Overall DACES sample and across several demographic groups, based on responses from the first three years of data collection (May 2020-March 2023), and 2) Examine the top ten reasons to leave the Army as predictors of actual separation from the Army.

DACES Participation

Over 134,000 surveys have been completed since DACES launched, representing 93,794 Active Army Soldiers (Table 1). Additionally, nearly one quarter of DACES respondents (over 31,000 Soldiers) have completed two DACES surveys, and 6.4% of respondents (over 8,600 Soldiers) have completed three DACES surveys. In Year 3, the DACES completion rate dropped to 8.3%. This decrease may be attributable, in part, to the low number of repeat survey takers. Approximately 80% of respondents have consented to their responses being used for research purposes.

Table 1. DACES Participation, Total and by Year

	Total	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Number of completed surveys	134,192	51,042	45,585	37,565
Completion rate	10.5%	10.9%	10.0%	8.3%

Top Reasons to Leave or Stay in the Army

Methodology

This analysis was limited to 72,107 Active Army Soldiers who completed a DACES survey during the first three years of DACES (between May 6, 2020 and March 31, 2023), consented to their responses being used for research purposes, and passed additional data quality checks (e.g., the embedded attention test). For Soldiers who have completed more than one DACES survey, only the most recent survey was retained. This analysis was performed in the Person-Event Data Environment Analysis Enclave (hereafter, “PDE”), a secure Army data repository and analysis environment (Vie et al., 2013; Vie et al., 2015).

Measures

DACES

Top Ten Reasons to Leave

This analysis examined responses to 57 five-point bi-polar Likert scale STAY/LEAVE questions on DACES. Possible responses included “Extremely Important Reason to LEAVE,” “Somewhat Important Reason to LEAVE,” “NOT an Important Reason to Leave or Stay,” “Somewhat Important Reason to STAY,” and “Extremely Important Reason to STAY.” For this analysis, responses were dichotomized to capture whether each item was identified as an “Extremely Important” reason to leave the Army. The ten items with the highest percentages of “Extremely Important reason to LEAVE” responses were identified as the top reasons to leave the Army.

Top Ten Reasons to Stay

Responses to the 57 five-point bi-polar Likert scale STAY/LEAVE questions were also dichotomized to capture whether a Soldier identified an item as an “Extremely Important” reason to stay in the Army. The ten items with the highest percentages of “Extremely Important reason to STAY” responses were identified as the top reasons to stay.

Demographic and Military Characteristics

Demographic and military characteristics were obtained from Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) administrative records. Measures included sex, race/ethnicity, marital status, paygrade, and time in service. Within marital status, “Separated” includes divorced, annulled, interlocutory (i.e., in the middle of legal proceedings but not yet officially granted a divorce), and legally separated.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics (e.g., the percentage of respondents who provided a particular response) were calculated in Oracle and Microsoft Excel. Because of the very large sample size examined in this report, it is possible to identify differences that are statistically significant but not practically significant. For comparisons of sample characteristics, differences of 5% or more were highlighted as potentially meaningful differences.

Results

Demographic Composition

Table 2 presents the demographic composition of the DACES analytic sample, alongside the demographic composition of the Active Army component. Compared to the Active Army population, the DACES sample is substantially overrepresented by Soldiers who are married (compared to never married), hold a higher paygrade (Senior Enlisted or Officer, compared to

Junior Enlisted), and have a longer time in service. The DACES sample is also somewhat overrepresented by non-Hispanic White Soldiers, compared to Black/African American and Hispanic Soldiers.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of the DACES Sample and the Active Army

Characteristic	Category	DACES Sample <i>n</i> = 72,107	Active Army
Gender	Female	11707 (16%)	16%
	Male	60400 (84%)	84%
Race or Ethnicity	AI/AN NH/PI	1107 (2%)	2%
	Asian	3880 (5%)	5%
	Black / African American	11229 (16%)	20%
	Hispanic	9078 (13%)*	18%
	Unknown	1182 (2%)	1%
	White (not Hispanic)	45631 (63%)*	54%
Marital Status	Married	53122 (74%)*	53%
	Never Married	13685 (19%)*	42%
	Separated	5175 (7%)	5%
	Widowed	118 (0%)	0%
	Unknown	7 (0%)	0%
Rank	E1-E4	6570 (9%)*	41%
	E5+	32991 (46%)*	39%
	O1-O3	13663 (19%)*	11%
	O4+	14370 (20%)*	6%
	WO1-CW3	3298 (5%)	3%
	CW4+	1215 (2%)	1%
Time in Service	<= 5 Years	13325 (18%)*	50%
	> 5-10 Years	14082 (20%)	23%
	> 10-15 Years	13752 (19%)*	12%
	> 15-20 Years	18041 (25%)*	10%
	> 20 Years	12907 (18%)*	5%

Note. AI/AN|NH/PI = American Indian/Alaskan Native and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. *Asterisks are used to indicate differences of at least 5% between the DACES sample and the Active Army.

Top Ten “Extremely Important” Reasons to Leave the Army

Table 3 presents the top ten “Extremely Important” reasons for leaving the Army across the Overall DACES sample. Table 3 also includes items that were flagged as a top ten “Extremely Important” reason for leaving the Army among one or more demographic groups, but not among the Overall DACES sample (lower portion of table). Percentages are provided for all groups for reference.

Table 3. Top Ten “Extremely Important” Reasons to Leave, Overall and by Group

LEAVE	Overall <i>n</i> =72,107	Female <i>n</i> =11,707	Male <i>n</i> =60,400	Married <i>n</i> =53,122	Unmarried <i>n</i> =18,985	Enlisted <i>n</i> =39,561	Officer <i>n</i> =28,033
Q24. Effects of deployments on Family or personal relationships.	29.2%	32.9%	28.5%	29.8%	27.5%	27.1%	30.5%
Q32. Impact of Army life on significant other’s career plans and goals.	27.4%	28.3%	27.2%	28.9%	23.1%	25.6%	29.3%
Q11. Impact of military service on my Family’s well-being.	27.13%	29.3%	26.7%	28.2%	24.3%	24.9%	29.3%
Q23. The degree of stability or predictability of Army life.	26.9%	28.2%	26.6%	26.2%	28.7%	25.3%	28.6%
Q31. Impact of Army life on Family plans for children.	26.1%	31.4%	25.1%	27.4%	22.3%	24.7%	27.2%
Q34. Work/life balance for my Family or personal life when not deployed.	24.6%	28.7%	23.8%	23.9%	26.5%	24.0%	25.5%
Q14. Ability to influence or choose duty station.	21.8%	22.6%	21.7%	21.3%	23.4%	22.9%	19.8%
Q52. Fairness of Army promotions.	21.5%	20.6%	21.7%	21.4%	21.7%	26.5%	16.0%
Q03. My morale.	20.6%	26.8%	19.4%	18.5%	26.5%	21.6%	19.3%
Q16. The flexibility to pursue my goals.	19.0%	22.1%	18.4%	16.9%	24.9%	19.4%	19.1%
Q36. Emotional demands of Army life.	19.0%	29.7%	17.0%	17.7%	22.8%	21.4%	15.6%
Q37. Mental or cognitive demands of Army life.	17.0%	25.6%	15.3%	15.7%	20.7%	20.1%	12.5%
Q29. Changes to Army policy	18.1%	12.9%	19.1%	18.8%	16.1%	20.1%	14.3%
Q28. Number or frequency of PCS moves	18.6%	18.7%	18.5%	19.5%	15.9%	15.5%	21.7%
Q17. Amount of enjoyment or fulfillment from my job	16.4%	20.0%	15.7%	14.3%	22.3%	17.3%	15.6%
Q27. Number or frequency of deployments.	12.5%	13.9%	12.3%	12.7%	12.0%	12.4%	11.4%

Note. Bold percentages indicate a top ten reason to leave, whereas grey percentages are provided for reference only. Additionally, red shading is used to indicate items for which a percentage is 5% higher in one group compared to the other (e.g., Female vs. Male). Darker red indicates larger differences.

Overall

“Effects of deployments on Family or personal relationships” was the biggest “Extremely Important” reason to leave the Army, identified by 29.2% of respondents in the Overall sample. Family concerns represent five of the top six reasons to leave the Army. Other top reasons to leave the Army include the predictability of Army life, the ability to influence or choose one’s duty station, the fairness of Army promotions, morale, and the flexibility to pursue one’s goals.

Notable Differences across Gender

A larger percentage of **female Soldiers**, compared to male Soldiers, identified the following as “Extremely Important” reasons to leave the Army:

- Emotional demands of Army life: 12.7% higher
- Mental or cognitive demands of Army life: 10.3% higher
- My morale: 7.4% higher
- Impact of Army life on Family plans for children: 6.3% higher

Conversely, a larger percentage of **male Soldiers**, compared to female Soldiers, identified the following as an “Extremely Important” reason to leave the Army:

Changes to Army policy: 6.2% higher

Notable Differences across Marital Status

A larger percentage of **married Soldiers**, compared to unmarried Soldiers, identified the following as “Extremely Important” reasons to leave the Army:

- Impact of Army life on significant other’s career plans and goals: 5.8% higher
- Impact of Army life on Family plans for children: 5.1% higher

Conversely, a larger percentage of **unmarried Soldiers**, compared to married Soldiers, identified the following as “Extremely Important” reasons to leave the Army:

- My morale: 8.0% higher
- Amount of enjoyment or fulfillment from my job: 8.0% higher
- The flexibility to pursue my goals: 8.0% higher
- Emotional demands of Army life: 5.1% higher
- Mental or cognitive demands of Army life: 5.0% higher

Notable Differences across Paygrade Groups

A larger percentage of **Enlisted Soldiers**, compared to Officers, identified the following as “Extremely Important” reasons to leave the Army:

- Fairness of Army promotions: 10.5% higher
- Mental or cognitive demands of Army life: 7.6% higher
- Emotional demands of Army life: 5.8% higher
- Changes to Army policy: 5.8% higher

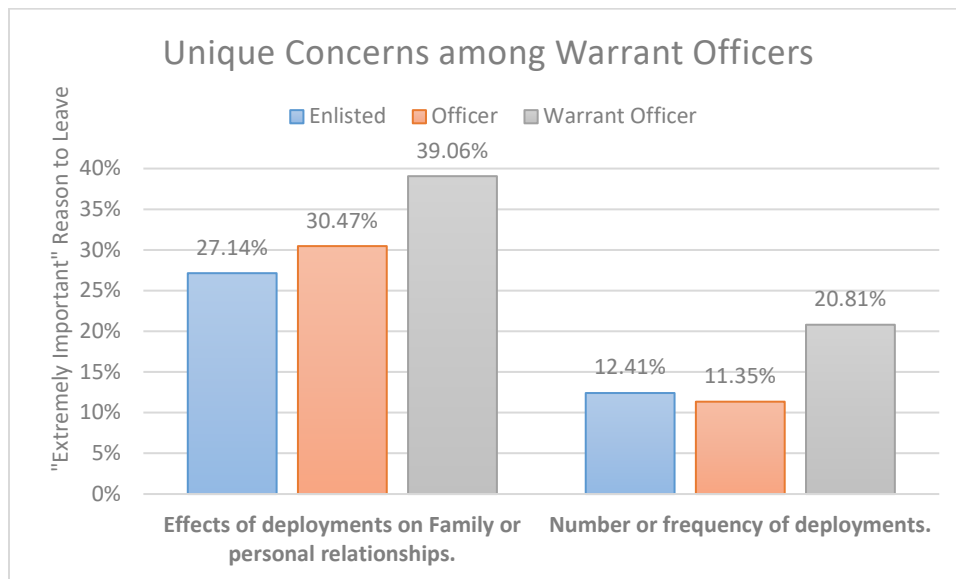
Conversely, a larger percentage of **Officers**, compared to Enlisted Soldiers, identified the following as an “Extremely Important” reason to leave the Army:

- Number or frequency of PCS moves: 6.2% higher

Warrant Officers

Warrant Officers identified “Effects of deployments on Family or personal relationships” and “Number or frequency of deployments” as “Extremely Important” reasons to leave the Army more than Enlisted Soldiers and Officers (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Unique Concerns among Warrant Officers



Three items were flagged as a top ten “Extremely Important” reason for leaving the Army among Warrant Officers, but not among the Overall DACES sample: “*Number or frequency of PCS moves,*” “*Changes to Army policy,*” and “*Number or frequency of deployments*” (see italicized items in Table 4). Overall, Warrant Officers more frequently identified top concerns as “Extremely Important” reasons to leave the Army, compared to both Enlisted Soldiers and Officers (see red shading and bolded percentages in Table 4).

Table 4. Top Ten Reasons to Leave the Army among Warrant Officers

	Warrant Officers n=4,513	<u>Reference</u>	
		Enlisted n= 39,561	Officer n= 28,033
1. Effects of deployments on Family or personal relationships (Q24)	39.1%	27.1%	30.5%
2. Impact of military service on my Family’s well-being (Q11)	33.1%	24.9%	29.3%
3. Impact of Army life on Family plans for children (Q31)	31.2%	24.7%	27.2%
4. Impact of Army life on significant other’s career plans and goals (Q32)	30.7%	25.6%	29.3%
5. The degree of stability or predictability of Army life (Q23)	30.3%	25.3%	28.6%
6. <i>Number or frequency of PCS moves (Q28)</i>	25.6%	15.5%	21.7%
7. Ability to influence or choose duty station (Q14)	25.4%	22.9%	19.8%
8. Work/life balance for my Family or personal life when not deployed (Q34)	24.2%	24.0%	25.5%
9. <i>Changes to Army policy (Q29)</i>	23.7%	20.1%	14.3%
10. <i>Number or frequency of deployments (Q27)</i>	20.8%	12.4%	11.4%

Note: Italicized items are top “Extremely Important” reasons to leave the Army among Warrant Officers but not among the Overall DACES sample. Red shading is used to indicate items for which a Warrant Officers percentage is at least 5% *higher* compared to one or both reference groups (bold).

Top Ten “Extremely Important” Reasons to Stay in the Army

In addition to examining the aspects of Army service that lead Soldiers to consider leaving the Army, it is also helpful to understand the aspects of Army service that make Soldiers want to continue serving in the Army. Table 5 presents the top ten “Extremely Important” reasons for staying in the Army, both overall and across different demographic groups. The lower portion of the table contains items that are a top reason to leave for one or more groups, but not the Overall sample. Percentages are provided for all groups for reference.

Table 5. Top Ten “Extremely Important” Reasons to Stay, Overall and by Group

STAY	Overall <i>n</i> =72,107	Female <i>n</i> =11,707	Male <i>n</i> =60,400	Married <i>n</i> =53,122	Unmarried <i>n</i> =18,985	Enlisted <i>n</i> =39,561	Officer <i>n</i> =28,033
Q42. Opportunity to serve my country.	48.7%	43.2%	49.7%	50.5%	43.5%	47.0%	51.4%
Q06. How well my retirement pay or benefits will meet my future needs.	40.7%	42.2%	40.5%	43.5%	33.0%	39.7%	41.5%
Q20. Opportunities to lead or train Soldiers.	39.9%	34.6%	40.9%	42.0%	34.1%	41.4%	39.6%
Q07. My sense of purpose.	33.9%	32.0%	34.3%	36.0%	28.1%	30.3%	39.4%
Q04. How well my pay or benefits meet my present needs	32.7%	37.3%	31.9%	34.7%	27.4%	32.5%	32.9%
Q05. How well my pay or benefits meet my financial goals	29.8%	35.1%	28.7%	31.3%	25.5%	29.0%	30.5%
Q19. Opportunities to improve my skills.	29.1%	30.3%	28.9%	29.9%	27.0%	30.5%	27.0%
Q15. Feeling like part of a team.	28.9%	27.0%	29.2%	30.5%	24.4%	26.8%	32.1%
Q45. Unit teamwork/camaraderie/morale.	28.2%	24.1%	29.0%	29.7%	24.2%	26.6%	31.3%
Q38. Opportunity to further my education.	28.2%	32.4%	27.3%	28.1%	28.5%	31.6%	24.0%
Q09. Quality of healthcare.	26.5%	29.4%	25.9%	27.3%	24.0%	29.2%	22.9%
Q39. Opportunity to progress in my career field.	27.0%	29.1%	26.5%	27.6%	25.1%	28.4%	24.5%
Q17. Amount of enjoyment or fulfillment from my job	27.7%	27.2%	27.8%	29.5%	22.8%	25.8%	30.0%
Q12. The resources available to help care for my family	25.2%	24.3%	25.4%	27.8%	18.0%	29.4%	19.5%
Q18. Opportunities to use my skills and abilities.	26.7%	27.3%	26.5%	28.0%	22.9%	26.6%	26.1%

Note: Bold percentages indicate a top ten reason to stay, whereas grey percentages are provided for reference only. Additionally, green shading is used to indicate items for which a percentage is 5% higher in one group compared to the other (e.g., Female vs. Male). Darker green indicates larger differences.

Overall

“Opportunity to serve my country” was the most frequently selected “Extremely Important” reason to stay in the Army, identified by 48.7% of respondents in the Overall sample. Other top reasons to stay were related to retirement needs, having the opportunity to lead, having a sense of purpose, pay/benefits, having the opportunity to improve upon skills/education, feeling like part of a team, and connecting with one’s unit through teamwork, camaraderie, and morale.

Notable Gender Differences

A larger percentage of **male Soldiers**, compared to female Soldiers identified the following as “Extremely Important” reasons to stay in the Army:

- Opportunity to serve my country: 6.5% higher
- Opportunity to lead or train Soldiers: 6.3% higher

Conversely, a larger percentage of **female Soldiers**, compared to male Soldiers, identified the following as “Extremely Important” reasons to stay in the Army:

- How well my pay or benefits meet my financial goals: 6.3% higher
- How well my pay or benefits meet my present needs: 5.4% higher
- Opportunity to further my education: 5.1% higher

Notable Differences across Marital Status

A larger percentage of **married Soldiers**, compared to unmarried Soldiers, identified the following as “Extremely Important” reasons to stay in the Army:

- How well my retirement pay or benefits will meet my future needs: 10.5% higher
- The resources available to help care for my family: 9.8% higher
- My sense of purpose: 7.9% higher
- Opportunities to lead or train Soldiers: 7.9% higher
- How well my pay or benefits meet my present needs: 7.3% higher
- Opportunity to serve my country: 7.0% higher
- Amount of enjoyment or fulfillment from my job: 6.7% higher
- Feeling like part of a team: 6.1% higher
- How well my pay or benefits meet my financial goals: 5.8% higher
- Unit teamwork/camaraderie/morale: 5.5% higher
- Opportunities to use my skills and abilities: 5.1% higher

Notable Differences across Paygrade Groups

A larger percentage of **Enlisted Soldiers**, compared to Officers, identified the following as “Extremely Important” reasons to stay in the Army:

- The resources available to help care for my family: 9.9% higher
- Opportunity to further my education: 7.6% higher
- Quality of healthcare: 6.3% higher

Conversely, a larger percentage of **Officers**, compared to Enlisted Soldiers, identified the following as “Extremely Important” reasons to stay in the Army:

- My sense of purpose: 9.1% higher
- Feeling like part of a team: 5.3% higher

Warrant Officers

Three items were flagged as a top ten “Extremely Important” reason for staying in the Army among Warrant Officers, but not among the Overall DACES sample: “*Opportunities to use my skills and abilities*,” “*Amount of enjoyment or fulfillment from my job*,” and “*Opportunity to progress in my career field*” (see italicized items in Table 6). Green shading and bolded percentages in Table 6 identify the aspects of Army service that Warrant Officers more frequently identified as “Extremely Important” reasons to stay in the Army, compared to Enlisted Soldiers and Officers.

Table 6. Top Ten Reasons to Stay in the Army among Warrant Officers

	Warrant Officers <i>n</i> =4,513	<u>Reference</u>	
		Enlisted <i>n</i> = 39,561	Officer <i>n</i> = 28,033
1. Opportunity to serve my country (Q42)	45.8%	47.0%	51.4%
2. How well my retirement pay or benefits will meet my future needs. (Q06)	45.4%	39.7%	41.5%
3. How well my pay or benefits meet my present needs (Q04)	34.0%	32.5%	32.9%
4. My sense of purpose (Q07)	32.3%	30.3%	39.4%
5. <i>Opportunities to use my skills and abilities (Q18)</i>	30.9%	26.6%	26.1%
6. Opportunities to improve my skills (Q19)	30.7%	30.5%	27.0%
7. <i>Amount of enjoyment or fulfillment from my job (Q17)</i>	30.3%	25.8%	30.0%
8. <i>Opportunity to progress in my career field (Q39)</i>	29.9%	28.4%	24.5%
9. Opportunities to lead or train Soldiers (Q20)	28.9%	41.4%	39.6%
10. Feeling like part of a team (Q15)	26.3%	26.8%	32.1%

Note: Italicized items are top “Extremely Important” reasons to stay in the Army among Warrant Officers but not among the Overall DACES sample. Green shading is used to indicate items for which a Warrant Officers percentage is at least 5% *higher* compared to one or both reference groups (bold).

Linking Army Sentiments to Attrition

This study extends the attrition study from the DACES Second Annual Report in two key ways:

- 1) It examines the top ten reasons to leave the Army as predictors of voluntary attrition, rather than just the top five reasons, and 2) extends the follow up window during which Soldiers may have separated from the Army.

Methodology

Sample

This study leveraged responses from 37,728 Active Army Soldiers who participated in the DACES Year 1 Birth Month campaign (May 6, 2020 through March 31, 2021), consented to their responses being used for research purposes, and passed additional data quality checks (e.g., the embedded attention test). Soldiers were then followed until they separated from the Army or until the end of the follow up window (October 31, 2022; based on the data available at the time of reporting). All analyses were performed in the PDE.

Measures

DACES

Top Reasons to Leave the Army

The top ten “Extremely Important” reasons to leave the Army for the Overall DACES sample (see Table 3) were examined as predictors of separation from the Army. Responses were dichotomized to reflect whether each item was identified as an “Extremely Important” reason to leave the Army (1) or not (0).

The items were also summed to create a Composite Leave Score, with higher scores indicating more “Extremely Important” reasons to leave the Army reported (possible range: 0-10). Internal consistency of the Composite Leave Score was good ($\alpha = .84$).

Left the Army

Personnel with a loss transaction indicating they left Active service in the DMDC Transaction file were classified as having voluntarily left the Army, as long as the separation was not due to death, retirement, transitioning from Enlisted to Officer, or an involuntary administrative action. Transaction data were available through 31 October 2022.

Demographic and Military Characteristics

Demographic and military characteristics were obtained from DMDC administrative records. Covariates included sex (male vs. female), race/ethnicity (American Indian/Alaskan Native and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Asian, Black/African American, Hispanic, non-Hispanic White, and Unknown), paygrade group (Officers vs. Warrant Officers vs. Enlisted), time in service (in years), education (up through high school vs. more than high school), and marital status (married vs. not married). In addition, length of follow up (in years) was calculated to control for variable timing between DACES survey completion and the end of follow up (fixed date).

Statistical Analysis

Analyses were performed using R (version 3.6.1). Binomial logistic regression was used to examine the association between each top ten reason to leave the Army (as identified on DACES) and voluntary separation from the Army (ten models in total). All models adjusted for covariates, which were entered into the model simultaneously. In addition, 95% confidence intervals (CIs) were also computed for adjusted odds ratios. The CIs indicate there is 95% confidence that the true adjusted odds ratio is within the specified range.

Results

Voluntarily Separating from Army Service

Of the 37,728 Active Army Soldiers who completed a qualifying DACES survey in Year 1, 8% subsequently chose to leave the Army. A summary of sample characteristics, both for the total sample and broken out by separation status, is provided in Table 7.

Table 7. Sample Characteristics for Attrition Analysis

Variable	Total Sample <i>n</i> = 37,728	Voluntarily Separated	
		No <i>n</i> = 34,793	Yes <i>n</i> = 2,935
Years in Service, mean (SD)	14.5 (11.2)	14.9 (11.3)	10.0 (9.1)
Education, No. (%)			
≤ High school	9,028 (24%)	8,222 (24%)	806 (27%)
> High school	28,770 (76%)	26,571 (76%)	2,129 (73%)
Gender, No. (%)			
Female	5,870 (16%)	5,324 (15%)	546 (19%)
Male	31,858 (84%)	29,469 (85%)	2,389 (81%)
Marital Status, No. (%)			
Married	28,719 (76%)	26,926 (77%)	1,793 (61%) ^a
Not married	9,009 (24%)	7,867 (23%)	1,142 (39%) ^a
Race or Ethnicity, No. (%)			
AI/AN NH/PI	570 (2%)	537 (2%)	33 (1%)
Asian	1,951 (5%)	1,786 (5%)	165 (6%)
Black / African American	5,836 (15%)	5,505 (16%)	331 (11%) ^a
Hispanic	4,553 (12%)	4,270 (12%)	283 (10%)
Unknown	653 (2%)	609 (2%)	44 (1%)
White (not Hispanic)	24,165 (64%)	22,086 (63%)	2,079 (71%) ^a
Rank, No. (%)			
Enlisted	19,807 (52%)	18,380 (53%)	1,427 (49%)
Warrant Officer	2,438 (7%)	2,350 (7%)	88 (3%)
Officer	15,483 (41%)	14,063 (40%)	1,420 (48%) ^a

Note. AI/AN|NH/PI = American Indian/Alaskan Native and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.

^a Indicates a difference of at least 5% between the separation groups.

Leveraging DACES to Predict Attrition

This study examined the odds of voluntarily separating from Army service based on baseline DACES responses (modelled separately), controlling for demographic and Army characteristics. Notably, each top ten “Extremely Important” reason to leave Army service was associated with a significantly increased odds of separating from Army service (i.e., greater risk of separation; Table 8). For example, the odds of separating from the Army was 74% greater if “Effects of deployments on Family or personal relationships” was identified as an “Extremely Important” reason to leave the Army (The 74% increase value was obtained by subtracting 1 from the odds ratio (1.74) and then multiplying by 100%). Across the ten DACES items, “The flexibility to pursue my goals” was associated with the greatest risk of separating from Army service (more than a three times greater risk of separating from Army service). When examined together (i.e., summed), the Composite Leave Score was associated with a significantly greater odds of separating from Army service. Specifically, each additional top ten “Extremely Important” leave reason identified was associated with a 21% greater odds of separating from Army service.

Table 8. Adjusted Odds Ratios, Based on Baseline DACES Responses

DACES item	OR^a	CI^a
1. Effects of deployments on Family or personal relationships.	1.74*	1.60-1.88
2. Impact of Army life on significant other’s career plans and goals.	2.01*	1.86-2.18
3. Impact of Army life on Family plans for children.	1.92*	1.76-2.08
4. The degree of stability or predictability of Army life.	2.33*	2.15-2.52
5. Impact of military service on my Family’s well-being.	2.58*	2.38-2.80
6. Work/life balance for my Family or personal life when not deployed.	2.15*	1.98-2.33
7. Ability to influence or choose duty station.	2.20*	2.02-2.39
8. Fairness of Army promotions.	1.64*	1.50-1.79
9. My morale.	2.79*	2.57-3.03
10. The flexibility to pursue my goals.	3.15*	2.90-3.42
Composite Leave Score	1.21*	1.20-1.23

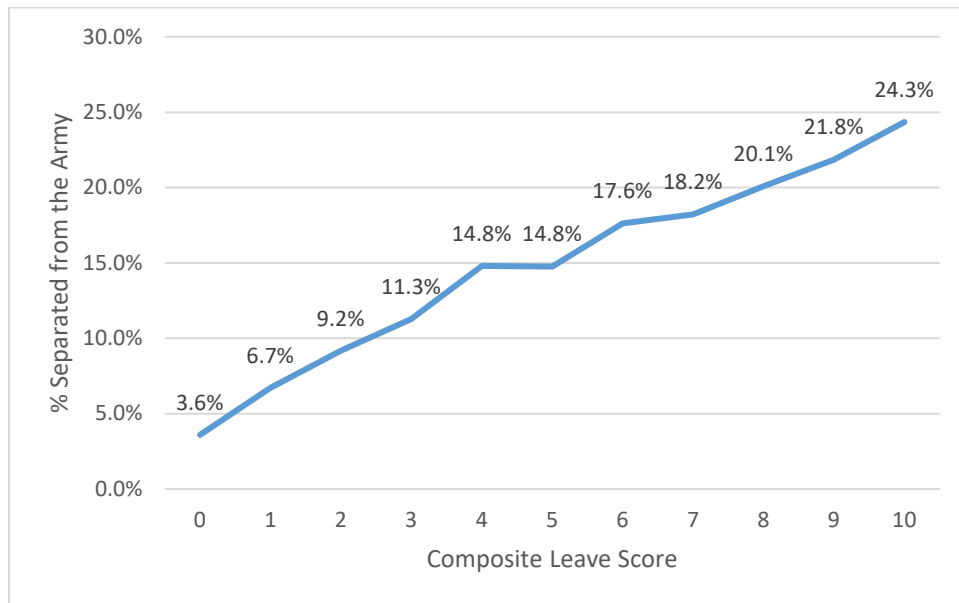
OR, odds ratio; CI, 95% confidence interval.

^aORs and associated CIs are adjusted for gender, race and ethnicity, education, marital status, rank group, time in service, and length of follow up.

* $p < 0.001$.

The unadjusted percentage of Soldiers who voluntarily separated from the Army over the study follow-up (up to 30 months) was also plotted by baseline DACES Composite Leave Score. This illustrates the incremental risk associated with each additional “Extremely Important” reason to leave reported. Figure 2 shows that compared with Soldiers who did not rate any of the DACES top ten reasons to leave as “Extremely Important” reasons to leave the Army (only 3.6% separated), identifying two reasons was associated with more than double the likelihood of separating from the Army (9.2% separated), and identifying all ten reasons was associated with more than six times the likelihood of separating from the Army (24.3% separated).

Figure 2. Percentage of Soldiers Who Separated from the Army, by Composite Leave Score



Discussion

This analysis extends the findings from the DACES Second Annual Report in two key ways. First, this analysis demonstrated that each of the DACES top ten “Extremely Important” reasons to leave the Army identified at baseline significantly predicted an increased odds of subsequently voluntarily separating from the Army (controlling for important demographic and Army characteristics). Second, this analysis demonstrated that retention sentiments reported on DACES can predict voluntary separation over a follow up period of up to 30 months.

A Composite Leave Score, which summed the number of top reasons to leave the Army that a Soldier flagged as “Extremely Important”, also significantly predicted subsequent separation from the Army. In addition, an unadjusted plot of the percentage of Soldiers voluntarily separating from the Army, by the Composite Leave Score, revealed that the percentage leaving the Army more than doubled amongst respondents who indicated two top ten reasons to leave, and the percentage increased more than six-fold amongst respondents who indicated all ten of the top ten reasons to leave as “Extremely Important” reasons to leave the Army.

Discussion and Conclusions

Through the third year of DACES data collection, DACES has been completed over 134,000 times by over 93,000 Soldiers. In its third year, the Army collected over 37,000 additional responses to the survey. Notably, five of the top six reasons to leave the Army relate to family. Other top reasons to leave the Army include the predictability of Army life, the ability to influence or choose one’s duty station, the fairness of Army promotions, morale, and the flexibility to pursue one’s goals. When interpreting DACES findings, however, it is critical to consider the representativeness of the sample.

Additionally, an analysis of responses from 37,728 Active Soldiers revealed each of the top ten reasons to leave Army service reported in DACES Year 1 powerfully predicted voluntary attrition from the Army over the next 30 months, even after controlling for key demographic and military characteristics known to be associated with separation behavior. Flexibility to pursue one's goals was the single strongest DACES top ten predictor examined, with more than a three-fold increase in risk of separating from the Army observed among those who identified "flexibility to pursue my goals" as an "Extremely Important" reason to leave the Army, compared to those who did not. Additional top DACES predictors of separation from the Army, in descending magnitude, were morale, the impact of military service on Family well-being, the degree of stability or predictability of Army life, the ability to influence or choose one's duty station, and work/life balance when not deployed. A composite score summing the number of top ten "Extremely Important" reasons to leave the Army identified by each Soldier, also significantly predicted voluntary separation from the Army. The percentage of Soldiers who left the Army doubled amongst those who identified two of the top ten reasons to leave as "Extremely Important" reasons to leave the Army, and the percentage increased more than six-fold amongst respondents who identified all ten of the top ten reasons to leave as "Extremely Important" reasons to leave the Army.

The present report is part of the Army's continued commitment to transparency. This report highlights just a few of the many important insights that have been gained through DACES. In the upcoming DACES year, the goal is to continue to share findings with Army Senior Leaders, so that DACES can continue to help inform policy decisions. Another goal is to increase the frequency with which DACES findings are shared with the Army community at large. A third goal is to increase participation in DACES, particularly within groups that are currently underrepresented in the DACES sample (e.g., Junior Enlisted Soldiers), both by working with Army leaders and organizations and by making the survey easier to access. Understanding the factors that drive Soldiers to leave Active Duty service, as well as those factors that motivate them to continue serving, is critical for fulfilling the goals and mission of the United States Army.

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Appendix A: Top Ten Reasons to Leave, by Demographic Group

This section provides the top ten “Extremely Important” reasons to leave the Army for each demographic group. The percentages for the reference group are also included. Items for which the percentage is 5% or more higher in the featured group than the reference group are shaded red.

Table A1. Top Ten Reasons to Leave among Female Soldiers

FEMALE	Female	Reference:
	n=11,707	Male n=60,400
1. Effects of deployments on Family or personal relationships (Q24)	32.9%	28.5%
2. Impact of Army life on Family plans for children (Q31)	31.3%	25.1%
3. Emotional demands of Army life (Q36)	29.7%	16.9%
4. Impact of military service on my Family’s well-being (Q11)	29.3%	26.7%
5. Work/life balance for my Family or personal life when not deployed (Q34)	28.7%	23.8%
6. Impact of Army life on significant other’s career plans and goals (Q32)	28.2%	27.2%
7. The degree of stability or predictability of Army life (Q23)	28.2%	26.6%
8. My morale (Q03)	26.8%	19.4%
9. Mental or cognitive demands of Army life (Q37)	25.6%	15.3%
10. Ability to influence or choose duty station (Q14)	22.6%	21.7%

Table A2. Top Ten Reasons to Leave among Male Soldiers

MALE	Male	Reference:
	n=60,400	Female n=11,707
1. Effects of deployments on Family or personal relationships (Q24)	28.5%	32.9%
2. Impact of Army life on significant other’s career plans and goals (Q32)	27.2%	28.2%
3. Impact of military service on my Family’s well-being (Q11)	26.7%	29.3%
4. The degree of stability or predictability of Army life (Q23)	26.6%	28.2%
5. Impact of Army life on Family plans for children (Q31)	25.1%	31.3%
6. Work/life balance for my Family or personal life when not deployed (Q34)	23.8%	28.7%
7. Ability to influence or choose duty station (Q14)	21.7%	22.6%
8. Fairness of Army promotions (Q52)	21.7%	20.6%
9. My morale (Q03)	19.4%	26.8%
10. Changes to Army policy (Q29)	19.1%	12.9%

Table A3. Top Ten Reasons to Leave among Married Soldiers

MARRIED	Married <i>n</i> =53,122	Reference: Unmarried <i>n</i> =18,985
1. Effects of deployments on Family or personal relationships (Q24)	29.8%	27.5%
2. Impact of Army life on significant other's career plans and goals (Q32)	28.9%	23.1%
3. Impact of military service on my Family's well-being (Q11)	28.2%	24.3%
4. Impact of Army life on Family plans for children (Q31)	27.4%	22.3%
5. The degree of stability or predictability of Army life (Q23)	26.2%	28.7%
6. Work/life balance for my Family or personal life when not deployed (Q34)	23.9%	26.5%
7. Fairness of Army promotions (Q52)	21.4%	21.7%
8. Ability to influence or choose duty station (Q14)	21.3%	23.4%
9. Number or frequency of PCS moves (Q28)	19.5%	15.9%
10. Changes to Army policy (Q29)	18.8%	16.1%

Table A4. Top Ten Reasons to Leave among Unmarried Soldiers

UNMARRIED	Unmarried <i>n</i> =18,985	Reference: Married <i>n</i> =53,122
1. The degree of stability or predictability of Army life (Q23)	28.7%	26.2%
2. Effects of deployments on Family or personal relationships (Q24)	27.5%	29.8%
3. My morale (Q03)	26.5%	18.5%
4. Work/life balance for my Family or personal life when not deployed (Q34)	26.5%	23.9%
5. The flexibility to pursue my goals (Q16)	24.9%	16.9%
6. Impact of military service on my Family's well-being (Q11)	24.3%	28.2%
7. Ability to influence or choose duty station (Q14)	23.4%	21.3%
8. Impact of Army life on significant other's career plans and goals (Q32)	23.1%	28.9%
9. Emotional demands of Army life (Q36)	22.8%	17.7%
10. Amount of enjoyment or fulfillment from my job (Q17)	22.3%	14.3%

Table A5. Top Ten Reasons to Leave among Enlisted Soldiers

ENLISTED	Enlisted	Reference:
	<i>n</i> =39,561	Officer <i>n</i> =28,033
1. Effects of deployments on Family or personal relationships (Q24)	27.1%	30.5%
2. Fairness of Army promotions (Q52)	26.5%	16.0%
3. Impact of Army life on significant other's career plans and goals (Q32)	25.6%	29.3%
4. The degree of stability or predictability of Army life (Q23)	25.3%	28.6%
5. Impact of military service on my Family's well-being (Q11)	24.9%	29.3%
6. Impact of Army life on Family plans for children (Q31)	24.7%	27.2%
7. Work/life balance for my Family or personal life when not deployed (Q34)	24.0%	25.5%
8. Ability to influence or choose duty station (Q14)	22.9%	19.8%
9. My morale (Q03)	21.6%	19.3%
10. Emotional demands of Army life (Q36)	21.4%	15.6%

Table A6. Top Ten Reasons to Leave among Officers

OFFICER	Officer	Reference:
	<i>n</i> =28,033	Enlisted <i>n</i> =39,561
1. Effects of deployments on Family or personal relationships (Q24)	30.5%	27.1%
2. Impact of Army life on significant other's career plans and goals (Q32)	29.3%	25.6%
3. Impact of military service on my Family's well-being (Q11)	29.3%	24.9%
4. The degree of stability or predictability of Army life (Q23)	28.6%	25.3%
5. Impact of Army life on Family plans for children (Q31)	27.2%	24.7%
6. Work/life balance for my Family or personal life when not deployed (Q34)	25.5%	24.0%
7. Number or frequency of PCS moves (Q28)	21.7%	15.5%
8. Ability to influence or choose duty station (Q14)	19.8%	22.9%
9. My morale (Q03)	19.3%	21.6%
10. The flexibility to pursue my goals (Q16)	19.1%	19.4%

Appendix B: Top Ten Reasons to Stay, by Demographic Group

This section provides the top ten “Extremely Important” reasons to stay in the Army for each demographic group. The percentages for the reference group are also included. Items for which the percentage is 5% or more higher in the featured group than the reference group are shaded green.

Table B1. Top Ten Reasons to Stay among Female Soldiers

FEMALE	Female	Reference:
	<i>n</i> =11,707	Male <i>n</i> =60,400
1. Opportunity to serve my country (Q42)	43.2%	49.7%
2. How well my retirement pay or benefits will meet my future needs (Q06)	42.2%	40.5%
3. How well my pay or benefits meet my present needs (Q04)	37.3%	31.9%
4. How well my pay or benefits meet my financial goals (Q05)	35.1%	28.7%
5. Opportunities to lead or train Soldiers (Q20)	34.6%	40.9%
6. Opportunity to further my education (Q38)	32.4%	27.3%
7. My sense of purpose (Q07)	32.0%	34.3%
8. Opportunities to improve my skills (Q19)	30.3%	28.9%
9. Quality of healthcare (Q09)	29.4%	25.9%
10. Opportunity to progress in my career field (Q39)	29.1%	26.5%

Table B2. Top Ten Reasons to Stay among Male Soldiers

MALE	Male	Reference:
	<i>n</i> =60,400	Female <i>n</i> =11,707
1. Opportunity to serve my country (Q42)	49.7%	43.2%
2. Opportunities to lead or train Soldiers (Q20)	40.9%	34.6%
3. How well my retirement pay or benefits will meet my future needs (Q06)	40.5%	42.2%
4. My sense of purpose (Q07)	34.3%	32.0%
5. How well my pay or benefits meet my present needs (Q04)	31.9%	37.3%
6. Feeling like part of a team (Q15)	29.2%	27.0%
7. Unit teamwork/camaraderie/morale (Q45)	29.0%	24.1%
8. Opportunities to improve my skills (Q19)	28.9%	30.3%
9. How well my pay or benefits meet my financial goals (Q05)	28.7%	35.1%
10. Amount of enjoyment or fulfillment from my job (Q17)	27.8%	27.2%

Table B3. Top Ten Reasons to Stay among Married Soldiers

MARRIED	Married <i>n</i> =53,122	Reference: Unmarried <i>n</i> =18,985
1. Opportunity to serve my country (Q42)	50.5%	43.5%
2. How well my retirement pay or benefits will meet my future needs (Q06)	43.5%	33.0%
3. Opportunities to lead or train Soldiers (Q20)	42.0%	34.1%
4. My sense of purpose (Q07)	36.0%	28.1%
5. How well my pay or benefits meet my present needs (Q04)	34.7%	27.4%
6. How well my pay or benefits meet my financial goals (Q05)	31.3%	25.5%
7. Feeling like part of a team (Q15)	30.5%	24.4%
8. Opportunities to improve my skills (Q19)	29.9%	27.0%
9. Unit teamwork/camaraderie/morale (Q45)	29.7%	24.2%
10. Amount of enjoyment or fulfillment from my job (Q17)	29.5%	22.8%

Table B4. Top Ten Reasons to Stay among Unmarried Soldiers

UNMARRIED	Unmarried <i>n</i> =18,985	Reference: Married <i>n</i> =53,122
1. Opportunity to serve my country (Q42)	43.5%	50.5%
2. Opportunities to lead or train Soldiers (Q20)	34.1%	42.0%
3. How well my retirement pay or benefits will meet my future needs (Q06)	33.0%	43.5%
4. Opportunity to further my education (Q38)	28.5%	28.1%
5. My sense of purpose (Q07)	28.1%	36.0%
6. How well my pay or benefits meet my present needs (Q04)	27.4%	34.7%
7. Opportunities to improve my skills (Q19)	27.0%	29.9%
8. How well my pay or benefits meet my financial goals (Q05)	25.5%	31.3%
9. Opportunity to progress in my career field (Q39)	25.1%	27.6%
10. Feeling like part of a team (Q15)	24.4%	30.5%

Table B5. Top Ten Reasons to Stay among Enlisted Soldiers

ENLISTED	Enlisted	Reference:
	<i>n</i> =39,561	Officer <i>n</i> =28,033
1. Opportunity to serve my country (Q42)	47.0%	51.4%
2. Opportunities to lead or train Soldiers (Q20)	41.4%	39.6%
3. How well my retirement pay or benefits will meet my future needs (Q06)	39.7%	41.5%
4. How well my pay or benefits meet my present needs (Q04)	32.5%	32.9%
5. Opportunity to further my education (Q38)	31.6%	24.0%
6. Opportunities to improve my skills (Q19)	30.5%	27.0%
7. My sense of purpose (Q07)	30.3%	39.4%
8. The resources available to help care for my family (Q12)	29.4%	19.5%
9. Quality of healthcare (Q09)	29.2%	22.9%
10. How well my pay or benefits meet my financial goals (Q05)	29.0%	30.5%

Table B6. Top Ten Reasons to Stay among Officers

OFFICER	Officer	Reference:
	<i>n</i> =28,033	Enlisted <i>n</i> =39,561
1. Opportunity to serve my country (Q42)	51.4%	47.0%
2. How well my retirement pay or benefits will meet my future needs (Q06)	41.5%	39.7%
3. Opportunities to lead or train Soldiers (Q20)	39.6%	41.4%
4. My sense of purpose (Q07)	39.4%	30.3%
5. How well my pay or benefits meet my present needs (Q04)	32.9%	32.5%
6. Feeling like part of a team (Q15)	32.1%	26.8%
7. Unit teamwork/camaraderie/morale (Q45)	31.3%	26.6%
8. How well my pay or benefits meet my financial goals (Q05)	30.5%	29.0%
9. Amount of enjoyment or fulfillment from my job (Q17)	30.0%	25.8%
10. Opportunities to improve my skills (Q19)	27.0%	30.5%