



**2015 ANNUAL MILITARY SPOUSE ATTORNEY SURVEY  
REPORT OF FINDINGS**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **About MSJDN**

The Military Spouse JD Network (MSJDN) is a bar association for military spouse attorneys. MSJDN members include men and women building careers in the legal profession while also serving their country with a spouse or partner in the United States Uniformed Services. Founded in 2011, MSJDN's mission is to improve the lives of military families by empowering military spouses through advocacy, professional networking, and job opportunities. The organization's over 600 members come from active duty, guard, and reserve units in all branches of the Armed Services. MSJDN also includes members who are veterans and/or are married to veterans of the Armed Services.

### **Purpose**

MSJDN developed an annual survey of military spouse attorneys to collect data to inform MSJDN initiatives and impact. The survey collects information about:

- military service affiliation of military spouse attorneys;
- branches of service, length of service, and military careers represented among military spouse attorneys and their spouses and partners;
- family composition and frequency of moves of military spouse attorneys;
- careers, including duration, type of practice, and how military service may have impacted careers of military spouse attorneys; and
- other factors impacting careers of military spouse attorneys, including service, licensing issues, and student loans.

### **Methodology**

The MSJDN Annual Survey opened on December 1, 2015 and was published to military spouse attorneys via email and social media. The survey ran from December 1, 2015 to December 31, 2015. The survey was advertised internally to MSJDN members and publicly to all military spouse attorneys during the period it was open. Three hundred and forty-four (344) individuals participated in the survey. MSJDN permitted any military spouse attorney to participate, regardless of membership.

MSJDN members compiled results for this report, and the full MSJDN Board of Directors had an opportunity to review the report for accuracy prior to publication.

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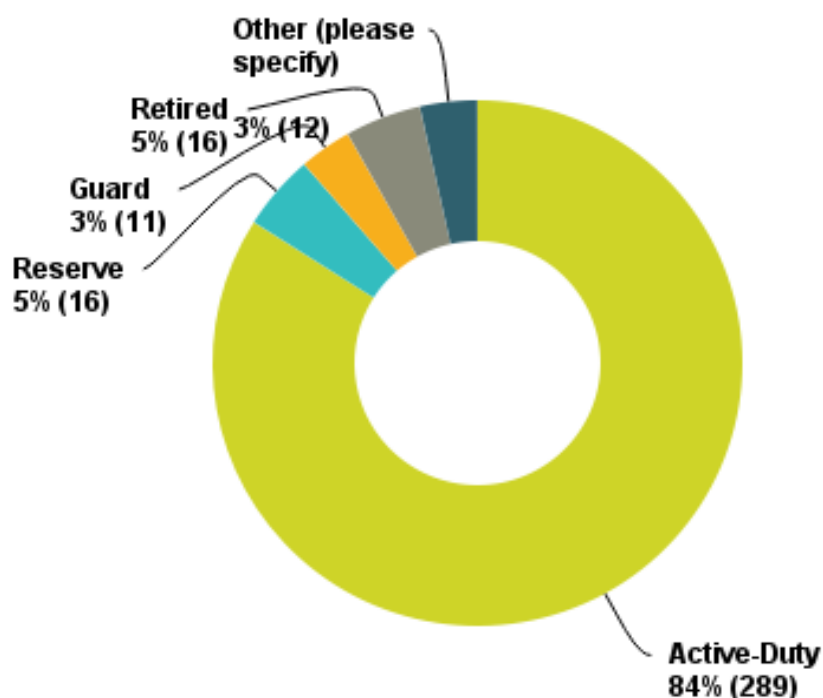
## FINDINGS

### **I. Demographics of Military Spouse Attorneys**

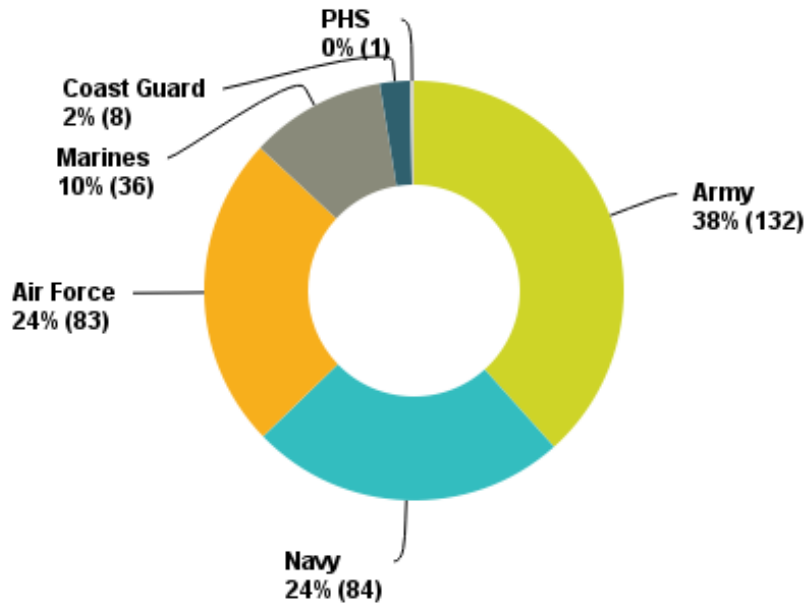
The community of military spouse attorneys is predominantly composed of women. Ninety-six percent of military spouse attorneys are women, while approximately 4% are men. These numbers are consistent with other demographics reports on military spouses. (The 2014 Department of Defense Demographics Report showed 93% of active duty spouses are female. A 2013 report commissioned by the Military Officers Association of America showed 90% of military spouses are female).

#### **A. Service Affiliation**

Military spouse attorneys come from active duty, guard, and reserve families, as well as veteran and retired active duty, guard, and reserve families. Active duty families make up the largest percentage of military spouse attorneys at 84%. The distribution of each type of service is reflected in the chart below. In addition, a number of military spouse attorneys are servicemembers or veterans themselves. Five percent of military spouse attorneys are currently serving in the military, and 12% are veterans. Among veterans, approximately 62% were Judge Advocate General (JAG) officers.

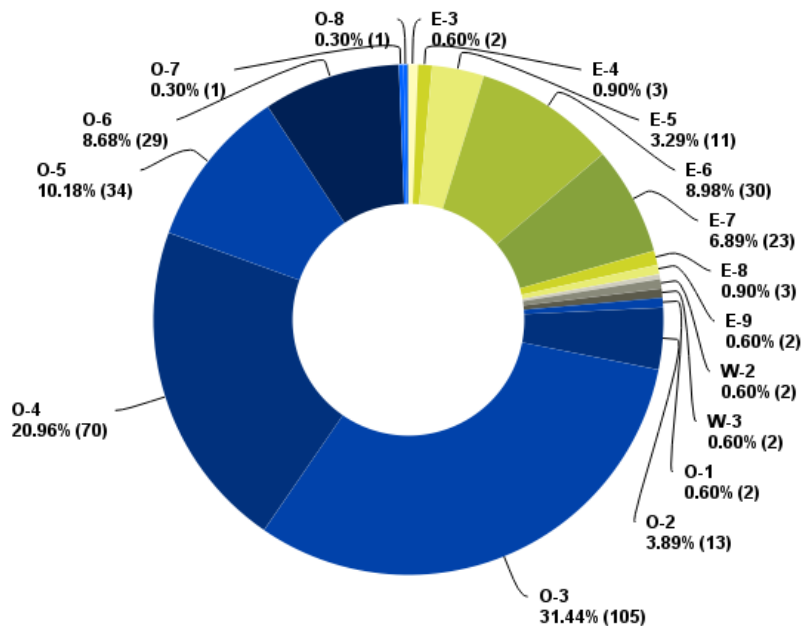


Military spouse attorneys represent all branches of service, as reflected in the following graph. The largest percentage of military spouse attorneys are affiliated with the Army at 38%, followed by Navy at 24% and Air Force at 24%.



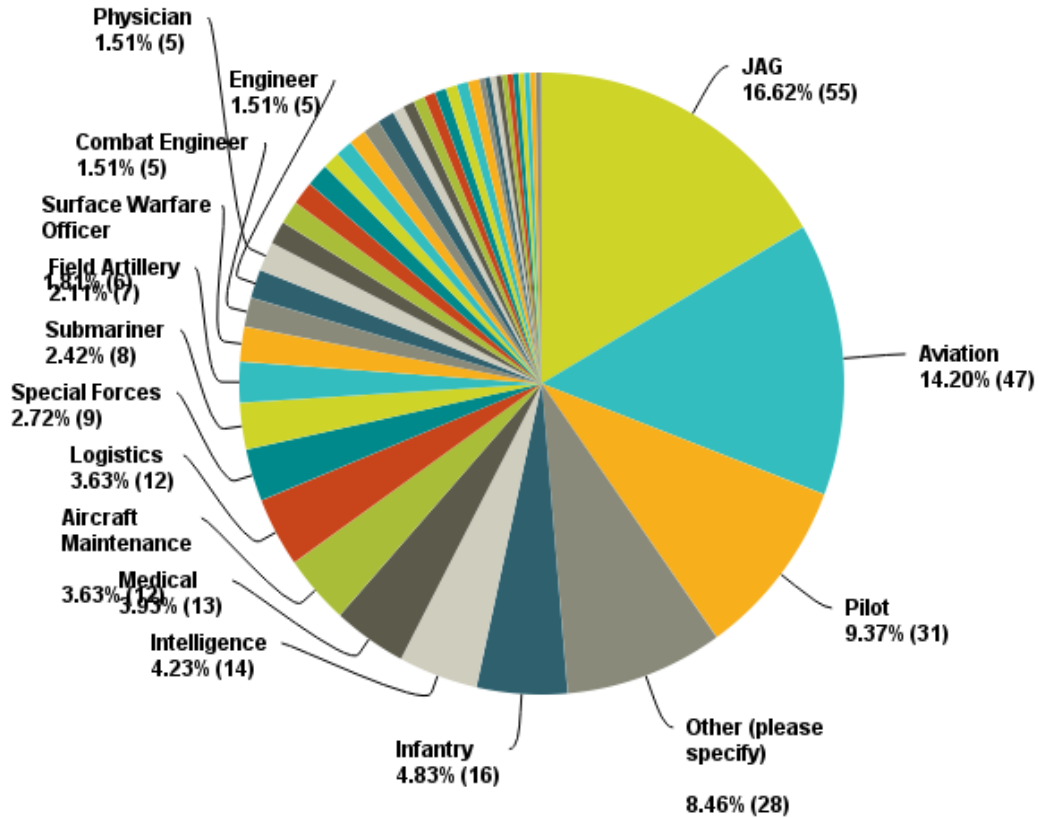
### B. Officer/Enlisted statistics

The ranks of MSJDN member spouses and partners vary widely, as reflected below. However, the largest distribution is among mid-level officer ranks. Approximately 79% of military spouse attorney are married to officers, 1% are warrant officers, and 19% are enlisted.



### C. Career Field

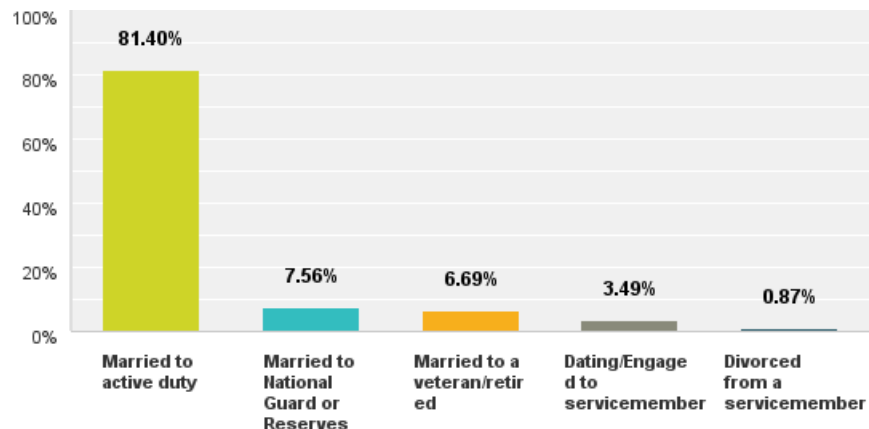
Military spouse attorneys are married to servicemembers in a wide variety of career fields in the military. The top five career fields were JAG (17%), Aviation (14%), Pilot (9%), Infantry (5%) and Intelligence (4%).



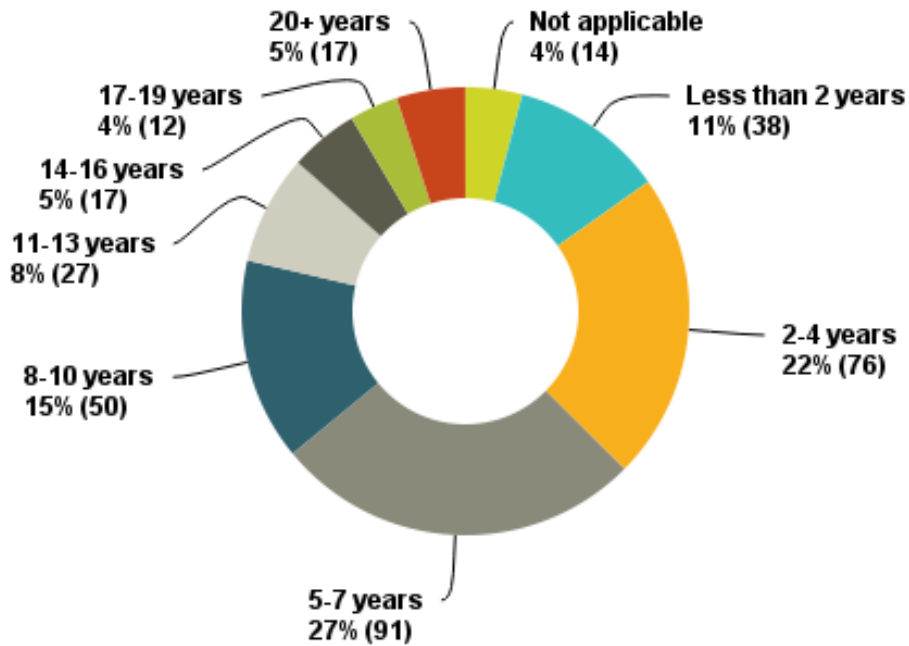
## II. Characteristics of Military Spouse Attorneys

### A. Relationship to the Military

Military spouse attorneys are a diverse group, but one thing they have in common is a connection to the United States Uniformed Services. The number of survey respondents married to servicemembers is 81%, with another 3% engaged to a servicemember.

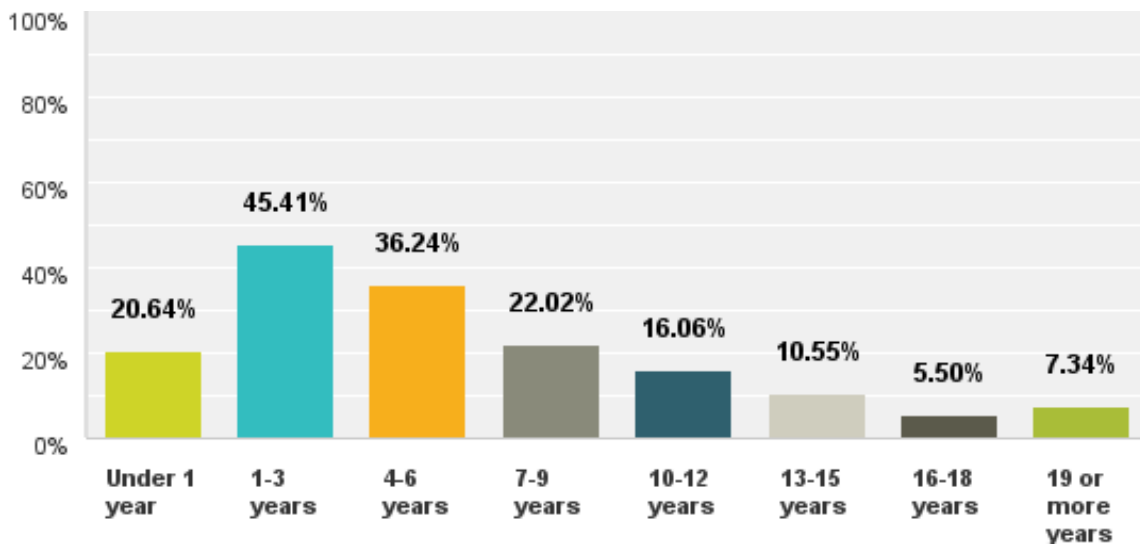


Of those married to servicemembers, less than 1% are in a relationship with a same-sex partner. As reflected below, 58% of military spouse attorneys have been married to their servicemembers for two to ten years.



### B. Military Spouse Attorney Family Composition

Approximately 64% of military spouse attorneys have children. The chart below reflects the ages of children in military spouse attorney households. The majority (78%) have 1 or 2 children, with the majority of those children under 6 years of age.

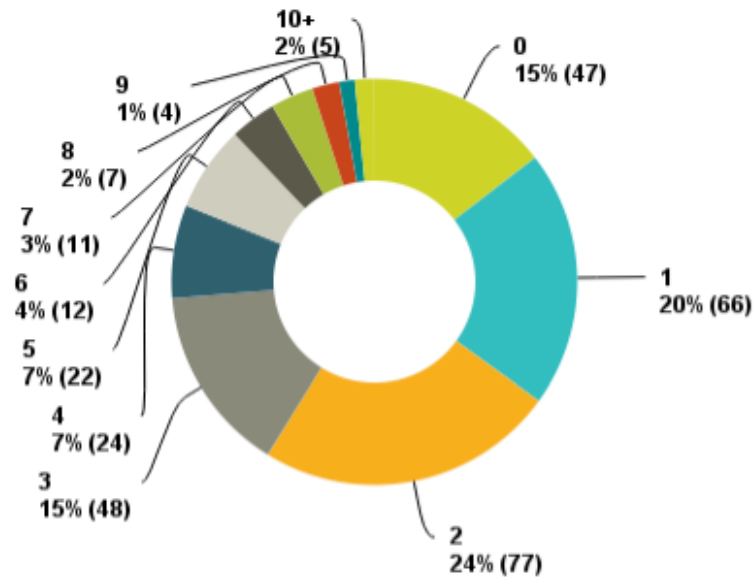


### C. Relocations

Permanent changes of duty station (“PCS moves”) are a frequent occurrence for military families and happen, on average, every two to three years. Approximately 65% of

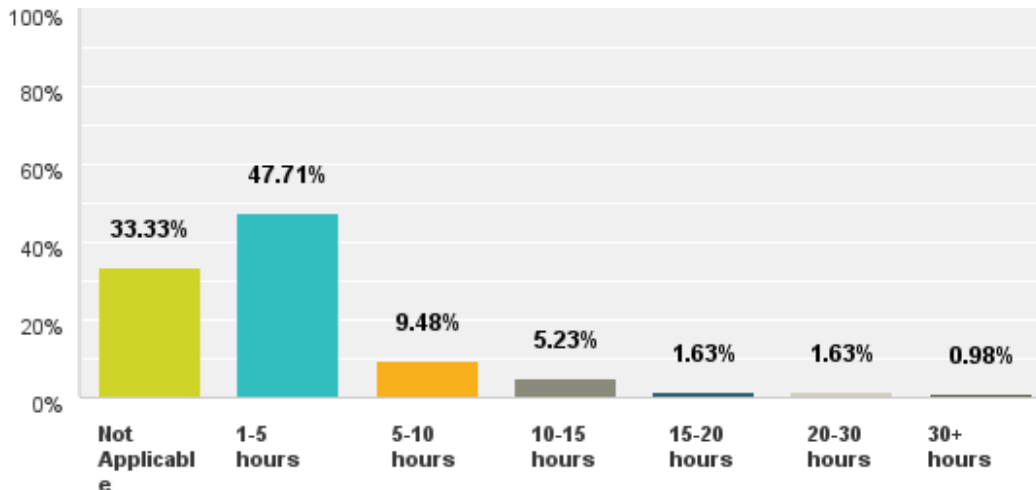
military spouse attorneys indicate they had experienced two or more PCS moves. Twenty percent indicated only one move during the course of their careers. Some indicated they have experienced more than ten PCS moves.

Not all military spouse attorneys move with their servicemember; approximately half have, at one point in their marriage, lived separately from their servicemember in order to maintain a legal career.



#### D. Volunteerism

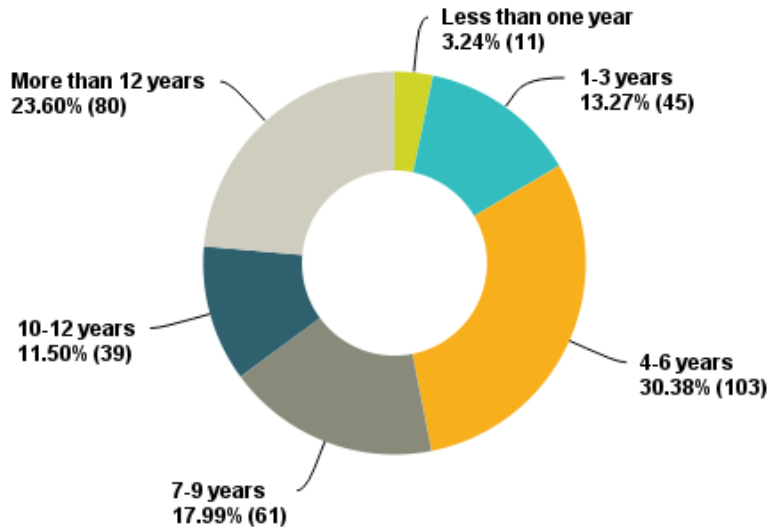
As a community, military spouses tend to perform significant hours of volunteer work. Approximately 67% of military spouse attorneys report they volunteer in communities where they live, and 68% indicate that they volunteer regularly. The next chart reflects the number of hours military spouse attorneys report they volunteer on a weekly basis. This reflects all volunteer hours performed by military spouse attorneys and is not specific to pro bono work. However, 34% of military spouse attorneys reported that they do pro bono work in jurisdictions where they are licensed.





### **III. Military Spouse Attorneys as Professionals**

The levels of experience among military spouse attorneys are fairly evenly distributed. Roughly 13% have between one and three years of practice. Another 30% have four to six years of practice, approximately 18% have seven to nine years of practice, and 36% have over ten years of practice.



#### **A. Types of Legal Practice**

Military spouse attorneys come from a wide array of legal backgrounds. The two most common practice backgrounds for military spouse attorneys are small firm and government practice. About 36% have experience working in a law group that has more than 50 lawyers. Only 20% reported ever having a solo practice during their legal careers.

#### **B. Remote Work**

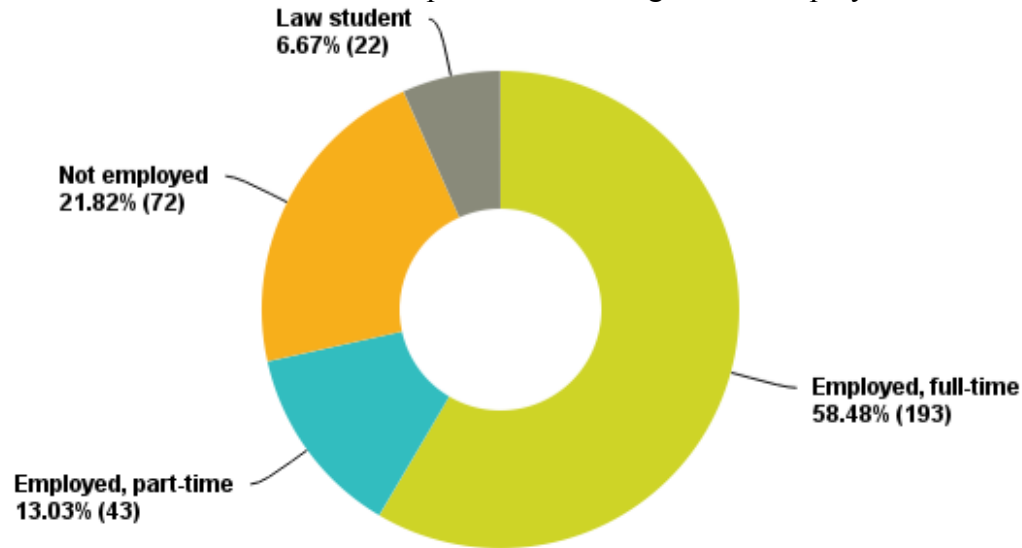
Due to frequent moves, it is often hard to keep a single position for an extended period of time unless an employer is willing to permit a military spouse attorney to work remotely. Only 34% of military spouse attorneys answered that an employer has provided the opportunity to work remotely.

### **IV. Impact of Military Service on Job Prospects**

When asked whether military service has impacted their ability to progress in the legal profession, 86% of military spouse attorneys answered in the affirmative. Sixty-one percent reported having been asked by a prospective employer about their status as a military spouse. Responses indicate their military affiliation is frequently a reason employers choose not to hire military spouse attorneys. Based on annual survey responses, employers provide a number of explanations, including: (a) the reality of frequent military moves; (b) concern that deployments will interfere with work performance; (c) the existence of gap periods in resumes; or (d) the perception that the military spouse is looking for a job instead of a career.

## A. Employment Status

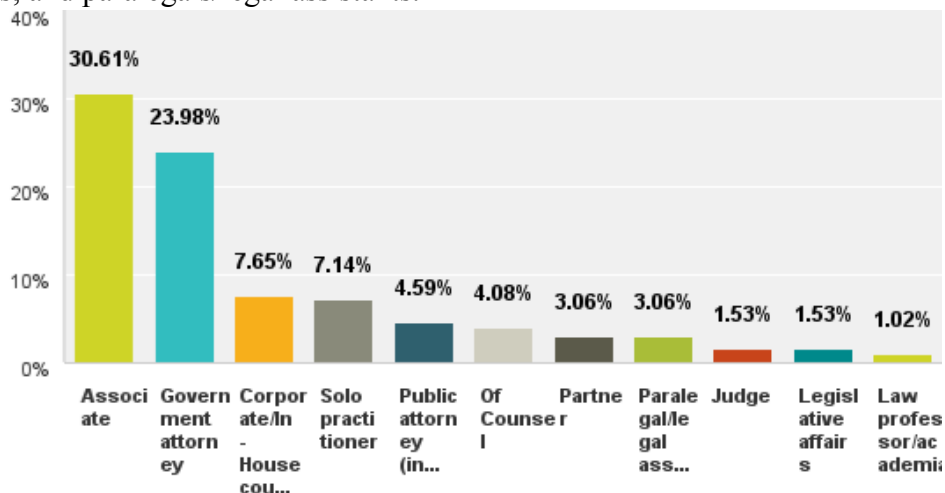
Despite the fact that 87% of military spouse attorneys have a license to practice law in at least one jurisdiction, only about 70% report having employment in a job requiring a law license. The chart below reflects responses concerning current employment status:



Of the military spouse attorneys not employed full-time in a legal position, 16% have some other kind of job, and 5% are employed part-time while seeking legal employment. Approximately 15% have some kind of part-time or self-employment; 15% are unemployed and seeking employment and 7% are unemployed and no longer seeking employment.

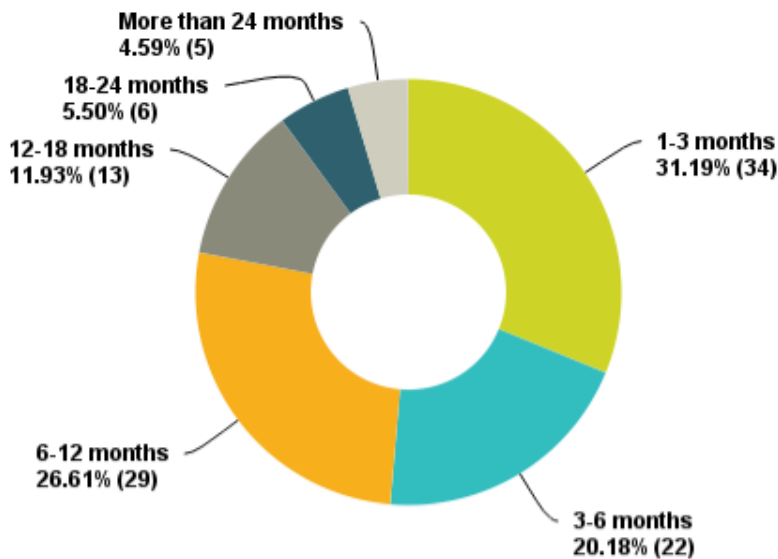
## B. Work Experience

Of the roughly 70% of military spouse attorneys who are employed in legal positions, the majority are involved in private practice, with government work a close second. 70%. Many work in a number of other legal fields as well, albeit in smaller numbers. These include in-house counsel, non-profit, legislative affairs, judges, law professors, and paralegals/legal assistants.



### C. Impact of PCS Moves

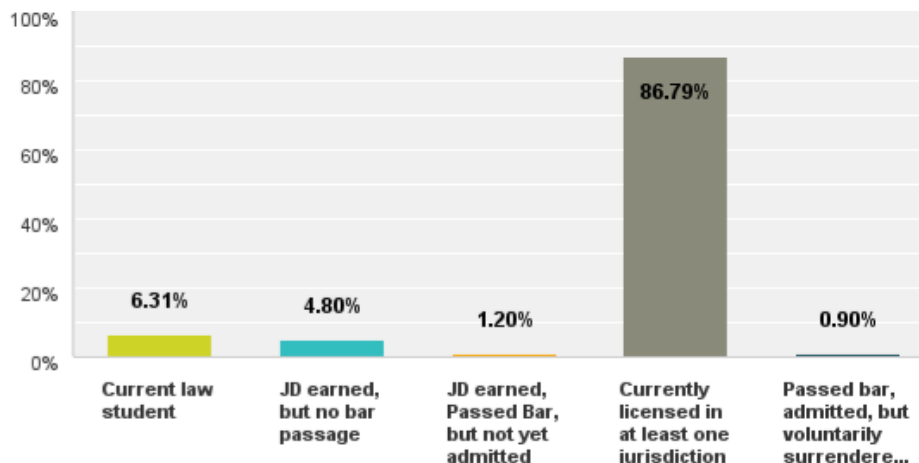
Approximately 15% of military spouse attorneys reported that they did not seek new employment, and 18% reported that they could not find employment as an attorney after a PCS move. Of the remaining military spouse attorneys who were able to find work in the legal profession after their latest PCS move, only 20% report that they found work within the first six months of moving. Another 10% indicate it took up to a year to find work, while 5% answered that it took them between a year and eighteen months to find work, and another 4% indicated that it took them more than eighteen months to find work in the legal profession.



### V. Law Licensure

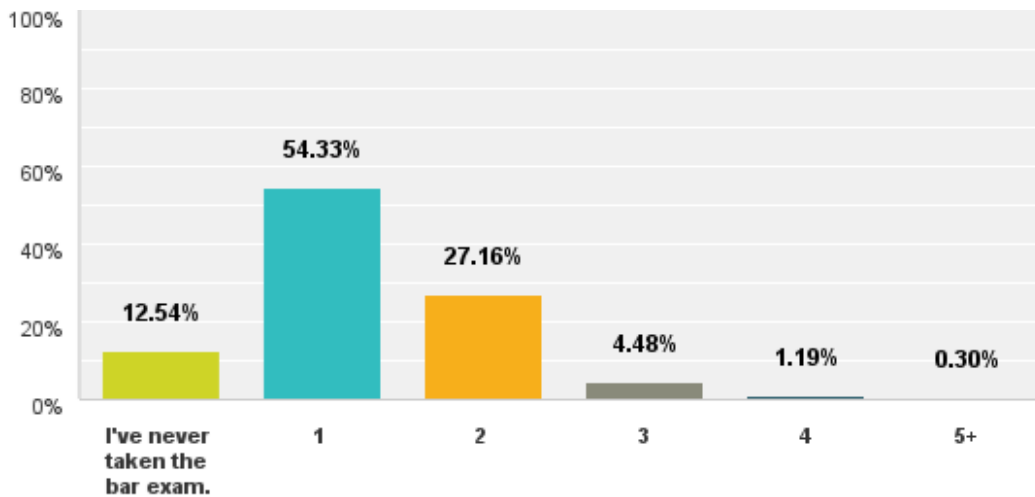
#### A. Law Licensure Status

Approximately 87% of military spouse attorneys reported that they have at least one active law license. Another 6% of members are law students, and 6% have earned a juris doctor but do not yet have a license.



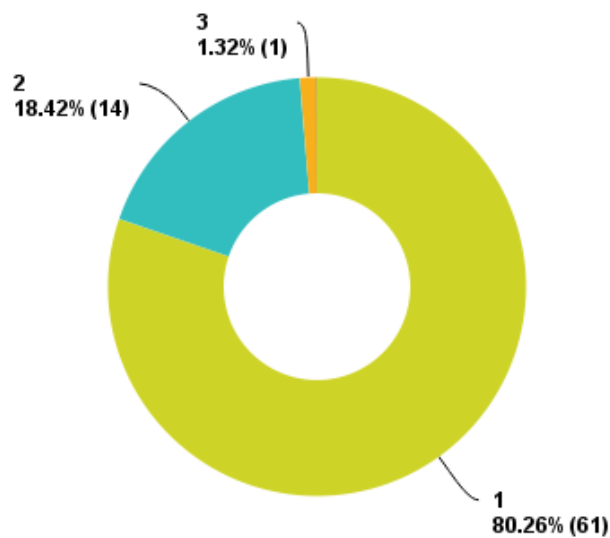
## B. Number of Bar Examinations

Due to the mobile nature of military life, military spouse attorneys often must take more than one bar exam; 87% of military spouse attorneys have taken and passed at least one bar exam. Of those, 27% have taken two bar exams, nearly 6% have taken more than two bar exams, and less than one percent have taken more than five bar exams. Seventy-seven percent of military spouse attorneys have only been admitted to the bar through examination.



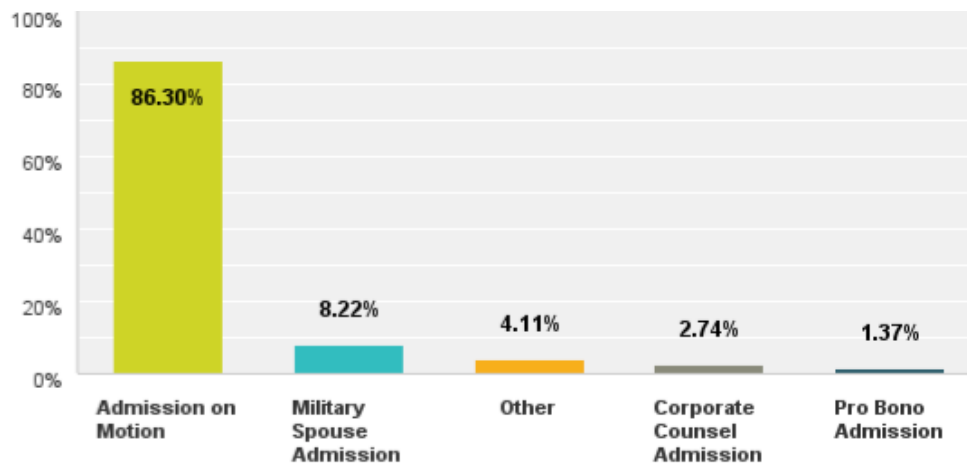
## C. Bar Admission Without Examination

Of the 23% of military spouses who have been admitted on motion, 80% (61 military spouse attorneys) have been admitted to at least one jurisdiction without having to take a bar examination. Eighteen percent (14 military spouse attorneys) have been admitted to two jurisdictions without examination, and a little over 1% have been admitted without examination in at least three jurisdictions.



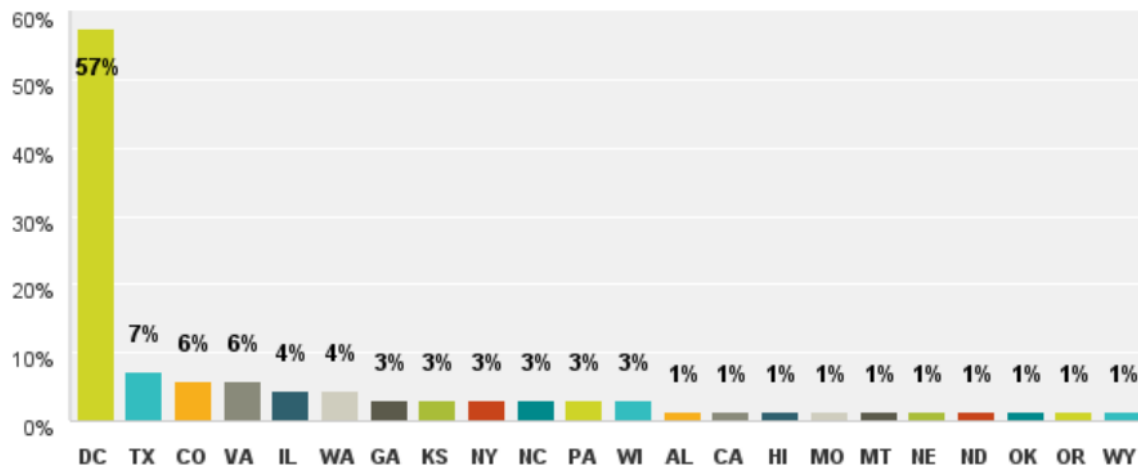
## D. Other Types of Bar Admission

Survey respondents further reported that the vast majority of admissions without examination were reciprocity (admission on motion) admissions, as reflected in the next chart. While approximately 34% of military spouse attorneys have been stationed in a state with military spouse admission, less than 3% of were able to obtain licensure in that state through military spouse admission. Survey respondents indicated that this was due to a number of reasons, including being stationed in the state prior to enactment of a military spouse rule, restrictive supervision requirements, and that the military spouse rule was enacted after the military spouse attorney had already sat for the bar. Of those that were admitted to the bar through military spouse admission, 50% were admitted to Colorado, 33% to Oklahoma and 17% to Illinois.



## E. Bar Admission Nationwide

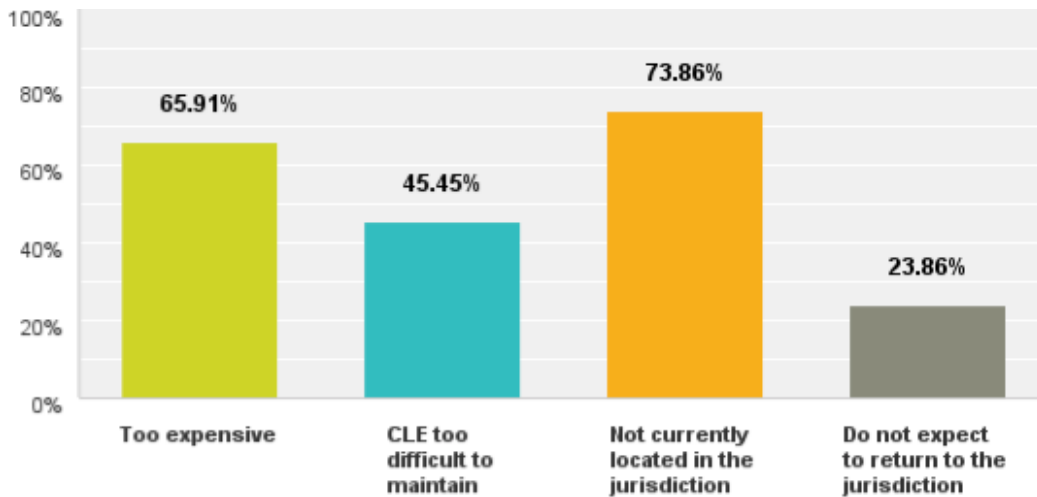
Survey respondents have taken the bar exam in all but nine states. The top five states where military spouse attorneys have taken the bar are California (20% of respondents), Virginia (12%), New York (11%), Florida (10%) and Texas (9%). Of those who have been admitted to the practice of law without examination, 57% of respondents were admitted in D.C., 7% in Texas, and 6% in both Colorado and Virginia.



## F. Professional Dues

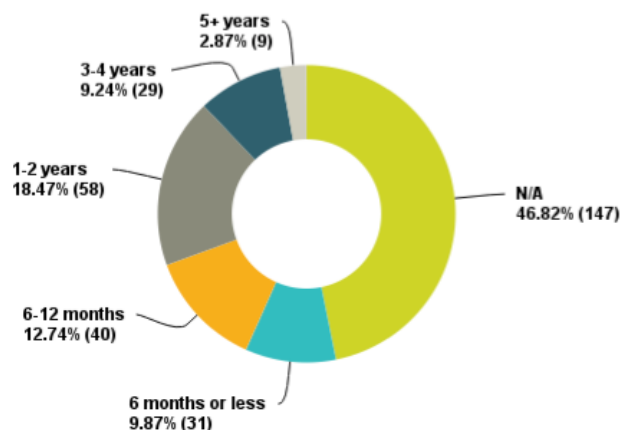
When asked to calculate the total amount they pay in annual mandatory bar dues, 26% report paying more than \$500 a year in annual mandatory bar dues, and 50% reporting paying between \$250 and \$500 in bar dues.

According to survey responses, 69% of military spouse attorneys maintain an active license in every jurisdiction in which they've obtained one. Of the 31% that do not maintain an active law license in every jurisdiction, 85% indicate cost is the reason they do not maintain their licenses. Another 46% report it is because the CLE requirements are too difficult to maintain their licensure.

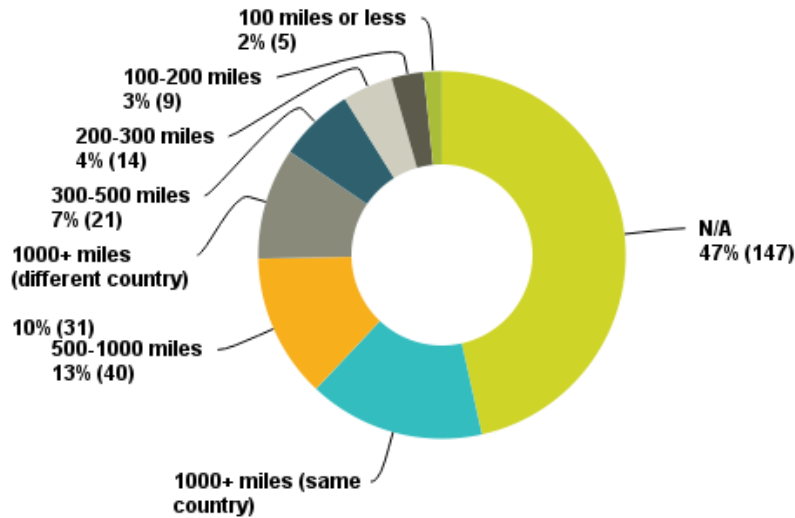


## VI. Separations and Remote Families

Approximately half of military spouse attorneys have lived remotely from a servicemember spouse to maintain a legal career. Of those who reported having to live remotely from a servicemember spouse, just 10% have lived remotely for six months or less. Thirteen percent have lived remotely for six months to a year, while 19% have lived remotely between one and two years. Finally, 12% have lived remotely from their servicemember spouse for more than three years.



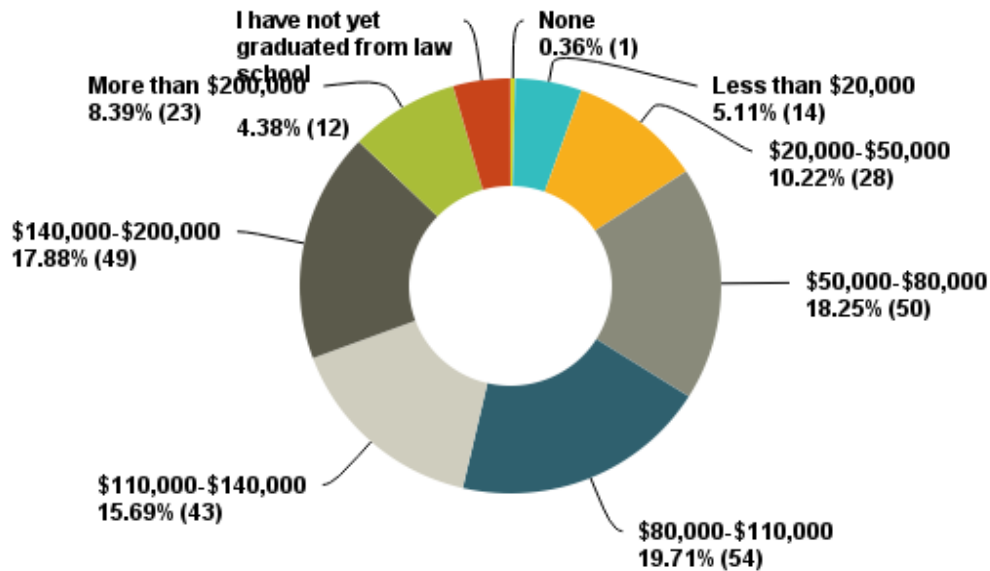
Of the military spouse attorneys who lived remotely from their servicemember, the greatest concentration, approximately 25%, have lived more than 1,000 miles away from their servicemember.



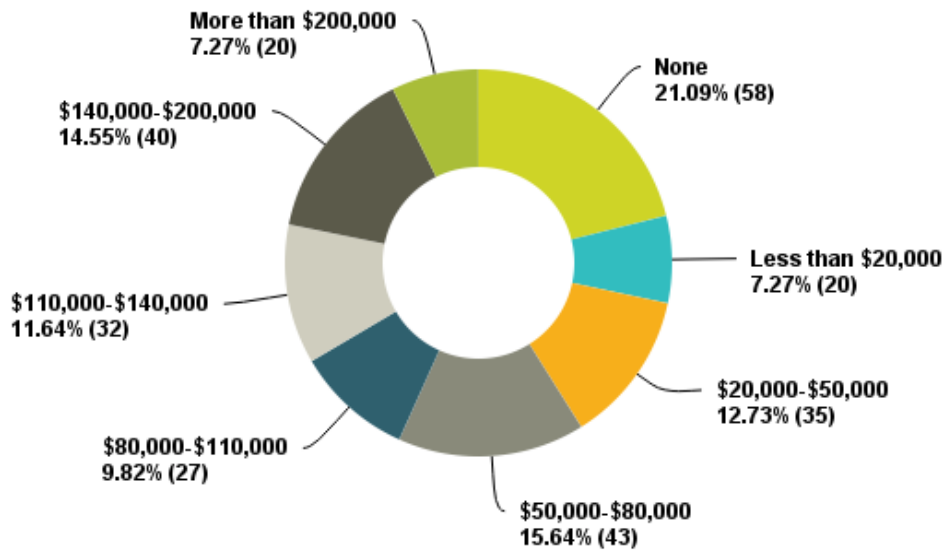
## VII. Student Loan Debt and Household Income

### A. Debt Incurred Prior to and After Law School Graduation

Based on survey responses, 85% of military spouse attorneys graduated from law school with student loan debt. According to a study conducted by the Institute for College Access and Success in 2014, the national average of students graduating law school with student loan debt is 69%. The following chart demonstrates the total debt held by military spouse attorneys after graduating law school.



The next chart demonstrates the total debt currently owed by military spouse attorneys



Less than 0.5% of military spouse attorneys finished law school with no student loan debt. Twenty percent of military spouse attorneys finished law school with between \$80,000 and \$110,000 in student loan debt; eighteen percent graduated with between \$50,000 and \$80,000 in student loan debt, and 42% incurred more than \$110,000 in student loan debt by the time they finished law school.

Approximately 43% of military spouse attorneys owe more than \$80,000 in student loans. Twenty-one percent have no outstanding student loans, and 7% have a balance owed of over \$200,000 of student loan debt.

One-third of military spouse attorneys report a high student loan balance impacts their spouse’s decision to stay in the military. In addition, 33% of military spouse attorneys report that student loan debt affects their decision about whether or not to PCS with their servicemember.

## **B. Household Income**

Household income among military spouse attorneys varies widely, with the largest distribution of income between \$100,000 and \$149,000. Based on survey responses to the question concerning their servicemember’s rank, this data would suggest that even in the households reporting income on the higher end of the spectrum, the military spouse attorney in the household is being paid below the national average for attorneys.