

NPRST



Navy Personnel Research, Studies, and Technology
5720 Integrity Drive • Millington, Tennessee 38055-1000 • www.nprst.navy.mil

research at work

2008 Pregnancy and Parenthood Survey

Background

With women comprising approximately 15% of the active component, Navy leadership continues to monitor the impact of pregnancy and parenthood on both men and women as well as on the overall readiness of the Navy. Because many of these data do not exist or are hard to extrapolate from current databases, the Navy-wide Pregnancy and Parenthood Survey has been the primary source for metrics related to pregnancy, single parenthood, and related topics. This survey meets the requirements of SECNAVINST 1000.10 which is to collect objective data for evaluating pregnancy policies. A version of this survey has been conducted biannually since 1988 to provide an accurate assessment of these metrics.

The 2008 Pregnancy and Parenthood Survey was administered from January to April 2008 to all active component women E-2 to E-9 and O-1 to O-5 (41,755), as well as to a stratified random sample of 9,412 men. Respondents were sent letters containing their unique user login as well as the URL for the survey website; the user login could only be used for one complete submission but respondents could save and resume their survey as needed. Respondents were also sent three reminders, which also provided the option of completing a fillable-PDF version of the survey. As in previous years, the survey contained a common core of items for both men and women, including items about parenthood, single parenthood, family planning, sabbaticals, attitudes towards birth control and health care providers, and sources of training on sexual health; the only differences were in gender-specific wording (e.g., “father a child” vs “become pregnant”) and in the addition of a section for women that asked about their pregnancy experiences. Survey items were skipped automatically if they were not applicable to a respondent based upon the respondent’s previous answers. All identifying information was removed from the data before analysis to maintain the anonymity of respondents. Results were statistically weighted by paygrade and gender to be representative of the active duty Navy.

**For more
information,
contact:**

**NPRST Public
Affairs Officer
(901) 874-2224
(DSN 882)**

**Navy Personnel
Research, Studies,
and Technology
5720 Integrity Dr.
Millington, TN
38055-1000**

There are about 6,000 single mothers and 12,000 single fathers in the Navy.

Over one-half of women indicate sabbaticals would motivate them to stay Navy.

The majority usually use birth control.

Findings

Thirteen thousand six hundred and twenty (13,620) personnel responded to the survey. The weighted response rates were 32% for women and 27% for men, slightly lower than in previous years but similar to recent Navy-wide, web-based surveys. Margins of error for overall questions ranged from $\pm 1.2\%$ for enlisted women to $\pm 3.0\%$ for officer men.

Percentage estimates of single parents are similar to 2005 results, although the numbers have decreased slightly due to lower Navy end-strength; there are an estimated 6,000 single Navy mothers and 12,000 single Navy fathers. The percentage of single parents have increased noticeably for the E-7 to E-9 paygrade group, for both men and women. Over half of enlisted women are unmarried when their child is born while over half of enlisted males indicate they became single parents through divorce; officers are most likely to become single parents through divorce.

Personnel who are single parents or married to another military member are required to complete the Family Care Plan, which describes plans for dependents when the service member is not available. Completion continues to be less than 100% (80% for enlisted women, the largest group required to complete), and there has been a slight decrease in compliance for enlisted women. For those who have not completed the form, the majority do have undocumented plans in place.

Respondents were asked when they believe a Navy woman should become pregnant, with answers ranging from “Never” to “Whenever she wants.” The percentage who indicated “Whenever she wants” is similar to 2005 for both male enlisted and female officers, but has increased for both female enlisted and male officers. When asked if their sea/shore rotation is adequate for family planning, one third of both male and female enlisted and one third of female officers indicate that it is not.

Respondents were asked about the impact of two specific initiatives on their retention intentions. Over half of women officers and 38% of enlisted women indicate that on- and off-ramps, sabbaticals, and other breaks in service would motivate them to stay in the Navy (35% of enlisted men and 30% of male officers agreed). Almost half of women (about 10% of men) indicate that the recent change to a 12 month post-partum operational deferment motivates them to remain in the Navy. These serve as the first data points indicating that new life/work balance policies may have the desired retention affect in the Fleet.

Point-in-time pregnancy rates are similar to 2005 for enlisted.

The majority usually use birth control, although the percentage for enlisted men is trending downward. Most feel comfortable discussing and getting birth control from Independent Duty Corpsman (IDC) and medical personnel aboard ship, significantly more than in 2005. As a response to the 2005 survey, the IDC Women's and Sexual Health training module was expanded from 2 to 6 weeks to incorporate more detailed training and experience. The 2008 survey reflects the positive impact of expanded training for IDCs on women's comfort level. Knowledge of emergency contraception is comparable to 2005 results. An additional question asked respondents if they use emergency contraception as their primary birth control method; few indicate that they do.

Point-in-time (snapshot) pregnancy rates are similar to 2005 for enlisted but slightly higher for officers, while the annual rate (those who became pregnant in FY07) has increased for enlisted women. Almost 2/3 of enlisted and 1/4 of officer pregnancies are unplanned. The majority of women continue to work where they are and are not transferred due to their pregnancy. While there is no significant increase from 2005 to 2008 in the percentage of enlisted pregnancies while assigned to a deployable unit, there is an increasing trend since 1999 which is disconcerting. A higher percentage of women are breastfeeding than in 2005, with over half indicating they are given the time and location to do so at work.

Recommendations

1. Publicize the survey results through a Navy NewsStand article, media such as Navy Times, and follow-on briefings
2. Modify the sexual health training module at Great Lakes to include greater focus on available birth control options and the Pregnancy and Parenthood OPNAVINST
3. Require Page 13 included in Enlisted Service Records acknowledging an understanding of the Pregnancy and Parenthood OPNAVINST
4. Identify funding for Fleet distribution of Pregnancy and Parenthood flip books. Minimum distribution target: Great Lakes, CMCs, XO's.
5. Require a Pregnancy and Parenthood OPNAVINST module in "Leadership and Ethics" course at USNA and ROTC
6. Incorporate Pregnancy and Parenthood instruction and detailing module at Department Head, PXO, PCO and command leadership
7. Coordinate efforts with BUMED Director of Public Health and the Center for Naval Analysis to support the upcoming Navy Pregnancy Study among enlisted women with a goal of understanding the causes and impacts of mistimed pregnancies.

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