

# Financial Issues Faced by Marine Corps Families

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*The United States Marine Corps requested that researchers conduct individual and focus group interviews at ten USMC installations to ascertain the nature of Marines' monetary difficulties. Sixty-nine interviews were held with 379 individuals. Financial inexperience combines with job related factors such as being stationed away from home, the "macho" image, and deployment to place lower ranking Marines at high risk for financial problems. Early mandatory financial management education based on the specific needs of military families is recommended.*

Key words: *Financial management, Military, Quality of life, Financial problems*

## Introduction

The United States military has increasingly come to the realization that financial readiness has a significant impact on military readiness. This awareness, coupled with reports of personal dissatisfaction with the quality of military life, and concerns about relations among quality of life, job performance, retention, and re-enlistment, prompted the Office of the Secretary of Defense to undertake a comprehensive review of the QOL of members of the U.S. military (Military Family, 1995). The task force assigned to examine these issues identified the need for strengthening and expanding social, familial, and community programs to improve quality of life and support military families. Financial difficulties were identified as a primary determinant of reduced quality of life among young enlisted military members and personal financial management was specifically identified as an important area of intervention.

At the request of Headquarters United States Marine Corps (USMC), a group of university researchers interviewed USMC military members, family members, staff and external support agencies to ascertain the level of financial difficulties within the USMC. The purpose of this paper is to describe the findings of the research and the nature of Marines' financial difficulties.

## Background

More than 30,000 young adults enlist in the United States Marine Corp each year, hoping to maximize their future occupational opportunities, obtain specialized job training, and qualify for future college

funding. Most new recruits anticipate a higher standard of living and enter the Corps expecting enlistment to be admission to the financial stability that attends adulthood's career track. However, these expectations are not always fulfilled. Too often young enlistees find themselves experiencing financial problems rather than improved financial security. In fact, there has been a substantial increase in the number and extent of financial difficulties experienced by military personnel and their families during the last decade. High levels of debt, loss of credit, and other financial crises, including bankruptcy, have become more prevalent. A significant number of enlisted members report that their financial status is inadequate (Tiemeyer, Wardynski, & Buddin, R, 1999), and almost one-third report substantial dissatisfaction with their standard of living (Kerce, 1995).

Many young enlisted service members and their families describe moderate to severe monetary problems. According to a Pentagon study, more than half of all enlisted service members are experiencing some type of financial trouble (Stone, 1998). Of those having problems, 27% report having trouble paying their bills, 21% have been pressured by bill collectors, 19% describe trouble making ends meet, 9% have pawned valuables, 4% are behind in their rent or mortgage payments, and 4% report "serious" difficulties, such as having utilities shut off, repossession, or bankruptcy.

Moreover, the financial problems of young military members may not simply be 'growing pains' similar to those suffered by many members of their age cohort.

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Although young people just starting out commonly encounter some financial strain, young enlisted personnel report more problems with financial management than their civilian counterparts. For example, 31% of enlisted service members report moderate to severe difficulty paying bills compared to 13% of civilians matched for age, race, gender, education and other demographic characteristics (Tiemeyer, et al., 1999). Furthermore, of the four services, Marine and Army enlistees report the greatest amount of financial difficulty. The apparent extent of young Marines' financial difficulties emphasizes the importance of identifying and addressing the nature of and sources of these problems so that appropriate programs can be designed and implemented.

#### *Financial Issues of Marine Corps Families*

The need for financial management support as an important contributor to quality of life was further reported in the extensive U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) Quality of Life Study (Kerce, 1995). The study found that although about 42% of Marine Corps members are generally satisfied with the standard of living, about 32% of the study respondents stated that the standard of living was terrible or they were mostly unhappy. Young new enlistees with children, or who were separated or divorced reported the most problems. Although most felt their financial situation was about the same as their peers, a large number, about 40% thought they would be financially better off as civilians.

Another important finding from the USMC Quality of Life study was that "as satisfaction with the standard of living increased, the amount of time spent thinking about income decreased (Kerce, 1995)." Within the USMC, there is a concern that time spent thinking and worrying about financial problems decreases military readiness and productivity; a concern that is supported by research. Financial challenges have been found to result in lowered productivity, lost time due to accidents, stress-related illness, security risks, and general employability problems (Garman, Leech, and Grable, 1996; Williams, Haldeman, and Cramer, 1996). Financial problems also indirectly influence readiness through their impact on the military family, for example by increasing the risk for familial abuse. Ike Templeton, Director of the Consumer Affairs and Financial Assistance Program for the Army Community and Family Support Center stated, "If there is a risk for abuse in a family, that risk is exacerbated in times of financial crisis" (Military Family, 1994). Clearly young Marines' financial affairs have an impact on every aspect of their work and family life.

#### *Possible Causes*

A number of possible causes have been suggested for the extent of the financial problems experienced by enlisted military members (Tiemeyer, et. al, 1999). Personal characteristics of young marines that may contribute to money problems include young age and early financial independence, lack of experience with financial management prior to entering the military, and the tendency to marry and have children at an early age. It has also been suggested that factors specific to military employment may also provide additional financial strain. Deployment and more frequent moves may contribute to household costs or the need to maintain dual households, and service members may find themselves stationed in areas with higher than average costs-of-living. However, it is not clear which of these factors (or others) may be responsible for the financial difficulties experienced by enlisted Marines and their young families.

#### **Methodology**

The U.S. Marine Corps contracted with a team of researchers from the University of California and North Carolina State University to investigate the scope of financial problems of enlisted Marine Corps members and the specific factors contributing to their financial difficulties. At that time there was no Corps-wide reporting requirement for indicators such as the number of non-judicial punishments (NJP) and courts-martial related to fiscal irresponsibility, the number of checks written to the Marine Corps Exchange returned for insufficient funds, or the number of Marines whose pay is garnished. Thus, quantitative information regarding the magnitude of financial problems experienced by Marines was not available.

To assess the nature and extent of the financial problems of young Marines, qualitative individual interviews were conducted with on- and off-base financial resource management specialists, and focus group interviews were held with enlisted Marines, Marine spouses, and unit commanders, at ten Marine Corp installations worldwide. These interviews examined the specific areas of financial difficulty experienced by Marine Corps members, the extent of these financial management problems, and the personal, environmental, and institutional factors that contribute to and support these problems. The availability of on- and off-base financial assistance resources and financial management programs, and the participants' perceptions of the importance and usefulness of current financial management training programs were also examined. Finally, participants' suggestions for ameliorating these problems were elicited.

*Interviews.*

A total of 69 individual and 57 focus group interviews were conducted with a total of 379 individuals. (See Table 1.) With the assistance of a coordinator at each site individual interviews were scheduled with the base commander, Personal Financial Management Program specialist, Family Service Center Director, Marine Corps Community Service Director, chaplain(s), legal representative(s) (JAG), Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society representative, and representative(s) of off-installation financial resources such as Consumer Credit Counseling Services. Focus groups (with eight to ten persons per group) were held with unit commanders, Staff NCOs (non-commissioned officers), first-line supervisors, representatives from Key Volunteer Networks and LINKS (programs for Marine spouses), and Command Financial Specialists. The site visit coordinator was encouraged to add other persons s/he thought would be knowledgeable about the financial well-being of Marines and their families. In order to stimulate honest dialogue, it was necessary to schedule the focus group interviews so that the various groups were not mixed together and so that higher and lower ranking individuals were not combined in the same group. For example, unit commanders were not in the same group with first-line supervisors.

Participants responded to questions regarding: their perceptions of the financial well-being of Marines and their families; their opinions regarding the importance of financial well-being to overall mission readiness; what could be done to improve the financial well-being of Marines and their families; and financial management resources on- and off-base.

Two investigators were present at the individual and focus group interviews. One person took primary responsibility for asking questions while the other entered the answers on a laptop computer. Before each interview began, the issue of confidentiality was discussed and assurances were given that the information collected would be utilized only for research and would not be shared with supervisors. With permission of the participants each interview was tape-recorded so that the notes could be reviewed later for accuracy and completeness. These recordings were later transcribed, although complete word-for-word transcripts were not possible because the recording, particularly during group interviews, was not always audible, and more than one participant sometimes spoke at the same time. Therefore, some responses were partially reconstructed from a combination of computerized notes and the transcript of the recording.

**Table 1**  
Individual and Group Interview Participants (N=379)

Participants	Individual	Focus Group
Base Commanders	5	
Family Service Center Directors	8	
Marine Corps Community Service Director	7	
Chaplains	12	
Command Finance Specialists (CFS)		39
Personal Financial Management Program Specialists (PFMP)	11	
Legal (JAG) representatives	13	
Unit Commanders		39
Key Volunteers and LINKS (Spouses)		50
First-line Supervisors and Non Commissioned Officers (NCO's)		49
1 <sup>st</sup> Sergeants (Sgts.) and Sgts. Major		61
Consumer Credit Counseling Services (CCCS)	6	
Navy Marine Relief Society	7	
Other--Family members and persons invited by MC		72

### Data Analysis

The interview notes were coded and analyzed using the winMAX<sup>®</sup> qualitative data analysis program.<sup>a</sup> Words and phrases indicating relevant concepts were coded and the codes were then read and reviewed for organization into meaningful categories that represent the important themes and sub-categories uncovered. This procedure results in data driven category construction from qualitative data that is less likely to be constrained by preconceived conceptual framework of the investigators. The winMAX<sup>®</sup> program coding process also results in the ability to identify coded quotations that illustrate the comments represented in each coding category and sub-category.

The analysis resulted in five major categories of information provided by the interviewees: (1) incidence of financial difficulties experienced by Marines, (2) indicators of financial problems, (3) impact/importance of these monetary difficulties, (4) contributing factors, and (5) ideas about what can be done to help Marines with their financial troubles.

### Results and Discussion

#### *Current Financial Well-being of Marines and their Families*

Most of the respondents agree that Marines and their families often have trouble maintaining a reasonable lifestyle within the means at their disposal. This situation leads to a greater indebtedness than is considered compatible with sound financial management. Although financial problems may arise at any point in a Marine's career, the participants repeatedly emphasized that the preponderance of widespread, chronic financial difficulties occur among the younger enlisted personnel, particularly within the first tour of duty. Moreover, Marines who are married and have children are two to three times more likely to experience major cash-flow problems. This appears to be true of young Marines of all ranks. Whereas the financial problems of enlisted personnel may be more overt or more often discussed, young officers are often beset with obligations, such as paying back college loans that frequently make it hard for them to stretch their paychecks far enough. The respondents also noted that young officers are less likely than enlisted personnel to admit they are in trouble or to seek counseling possibly due to the perceived career-threatening stigma attached to an inability to meet their financial responsibilities.

#### *Incidence of Financial Management Problems*

Estimates of the percentage of Marines with major indebtedness ranged from 10% to 95%, and varied by installation (and often within a single installation), depending upon the perspectives of the people

interviewed, the rank of the Marine being discussed, and location. Some of the Key Volunteers and LINKS members (Marine wives) indicated that as many as 70% to 90% of married first-term enlisted Marines live from payday to payday and/or have major problems. A respondent from Okinawa spoke of a "10-80-10" distribution: "Ten percent have problems, 80% tread water, 10% have a good plan." At some installations the percentage of lower ranking young Marines with serious financial problems was reported to be considerably higher. At one California site participants reported that 31% of the single and 37% of the married Marines are in financial trouble, while at another California site the reported incidence of financial problems for young married Marines was 40%. The highest figure for young married Marines in debt at stateside installations was 75%. Overseas-based respondents differed in their estimations, some setting the figure at 10% or below and others indicating that more than half of their young Marines are having problems. However, despite the variability in these estimates of the incidence of financial difficulties, it is clear that these problems are significant and widespread, especially among the younger lower-rank service members and their families. It is also clear that overseas and isolated locations may increase the probability of financial difficulties. Many factors contribute to this including lack of jobs for spouses, lack of on-base housing, and being separated from family support systems.

#### *Common Financial Problems*

A number of indicators of impending or existing indebtedness were reported at most or all installations. The most common problems reported include bounced checks and/or suspensions of check-cashing privileges, owning new cars, high credit card debt and overuse of credit, and high phone bills. Less frequent, but not uncommon, problems include borrowing money from peers, calls from creditors and letters of indebtedness (LOIs), and non-judicial punishments (NJP) for financial malfeasance.

Participants from all locations indicated that many young Marines are writing bad checks. Two possible scenarios are reported. In many cases it seems that bounced checks result from a lack of financial information or experience: Marines do not understand how to keep track of their expenses; are unaware of the high charges attending returned checks and do not subtract those from their checking balances; forget or do not understand the need to subtract ATM withdrawals from apparent available balances; or just don't know how to balance their checkbooks. It was commonly reported that young Marines assume control of a paycheck and bank account before they have the

knowledge needed to maintain it. “[We] put them on direct deposit in Boot Camp...They go out and apply for a checkbook and everything...but [we] do not require them to ever receive a class on checkbook writing. And...by the time they get to the school, they’ve already bounced checks, never balanced the book, never got taught by their parents, and we have that problem.”

Some bounced checks seem to result from more purposeful mismanagement. Non-commissioned officers at Camp Butler, Okinawa, noted that young Marines “bounced checks to make ends meet,” and that “write checks they don’t have funds for,” suggesting that when some young Marines are out of money, they deliberately write bad checks to “extend” their ability to purchase or pay bills. However, whether checks bounce because enlistees are not keeping track of their checking accounts, or bad checks are written when Marines know they are without funds, the problem is an extensive one. Personnel at all ten installations reported problems stemming from check bouncing.

Another widespread problem results when Marines buy automobiles. Buying a new car as soon as possible after reaching the first duty station is number one on the typical young Marine’s list, and also numbered first on the list of top financial problems by participants at many of the state-side installations. Car dealers and lending institutions seem to be in unintentional collusion to encourage Marines to buy new cars instead of more affordable used ones. The car dealers entice the Marine to buy on credit with little or no down payment and the lending institutions, as one staff NCO explained, are unwilling to give loans for used cars except over the long term at high rates of interest, “and the guy’s going to be leaving before that. Or they can’t afford the short-term loans the banks and credit unions will give them for used cars.” A great many young Marines begin their careers by shouldering thousands of dollars worth of debt in this way. In addition they do not factor in the costs of insurance until it is too late, the contract is signed, and they have a five-year monthly obligation. “The insurance they never account for until after they get the bill for it.” Even when the young Marine can manage the car payment, the additional expenses of insurance and maintenance often cause the costs to exceed her/his ability to pay.

Participants agreed that misuse of credit is one of the most insidious and pervasive financial problems at all installations. Respondents at every installation identified the ready availability of credit without instruction in its use as a major problem. Credit and ATM cards can seem to be a bottomless source of funds to uninformed Marines and their families. Untrained in financial management, the young enlisted

Marine views the credit card as “additional income,” without necessarily acknowledging that the bill has to be paid.

The services own Deferred Payment Plan (DPP), a credit arrangement that can be used at the Base Exchange, is subject to abuse. According to the Army and Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES), the Marine Corps has a higher rate of DPP indebtedness than other services (12%). One respondent said, “DPP is a problem; anyone can get the credit card and they won’t waive finance charges like other creditors.” As other bills pile up, Marines are using credit cards and DPP for daily purchases, which then accumulate as additional debt that needs to be paid. An NCO noted, “[They are] buying groceries with them. Using your credit card—using money that’s not yours—pretty much for day-to-day expenses. ... buying food with credit cards... really puts a lot of Marines in the hole real quickly. And credit is available to Marines very easily, like DPP. That’s a major killer.” DPP use is closely tracked at all installations, and reliance upon DPP for small items and food is often taken as a key signal that Marines families are in trouble. This frequently occurs near the end of the month or when the Marine is deployed and there is simply not enough money left to carry families until the next pay or allotment check arrives.

Most participants noted that many kinds of credit are too readily available to young enlisted Marines. “One of the major problems is the availability of credit. It is really easy to get and they don’t understand that this could translate into high interest rates. We’ve seen as high as 23% for furniture and cars.”

Some young Marines, after running out of ready cash, use check-cashing establishments to secure payday loans, loans that advance them money before payday. “The check advance businesses are probably the worst thing in life,” one base commander told us. Personnel from several installations numbered these among the most insidious pitfalls for Marines. At Camp Lejeune, Key Volunteers and LINKS representatives suggested that up to 70% of E-5s (enlisted member at mid-rank) and below use them as a standard resource. Another respondent doubted if the Marines who frequent the check-cashers understand the interest system. “They may have thought they were borrowing at 18% per year and it was 18% per month.” Thus, the availability and poor use of credit, both on-base and off, frequently contribute to young enlisted Marines’ financial management difficulties.

High phone bills, especially cell phone bills, are a problem reported on both domestic and overseas installations, but the emphasis on cell-phone use was noted specifically by respondents abroad. Marines and

their spouses, separated from their families and from one another, turn to long-distance calls as a partial solution, particularly when there are pressing financial matters to discuss. While regular phone companies set a limit on long-distance charges and cut subscribers off after they have reached it, cell phone companies often let customers run much higher bills with interest computed on the unpaid balance. Access to e-mail has helped reduce this problem for some Marines, but many still prefer to hear the voices of loved ones, running up potentially huge costs ranging from \$300 – \$1500 a month. One NCO reported, “I’ve seen the telephone bills to be high—\$300 to \$400. They may have a cell phone bill at the same time, along with credit card bills.” Many other respondents described similar situations.

The interview participants reported several less common, but very serious, indicators of financial problems among young Marines. Marines who find themselves in extreme financial need may borrow money from their peers, a potential source of conflict that is all too likely to negatively impact morale and job performance. Calls from creditors and multiple letters of indebtedness indicate that the Marines’ finances are out of control. Emergency loans, whether from the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society or from banks or credit unions, become an indicator of financial problems when a Marine requests more than one without overwhelming evidence that subsequent requests reflect true emergencies. When Marines fail to keep up with payments on vehicles and other merchandise, the unit may receive calls from businesses or collection agencies.

When financial difficulties seem insurmountable Marines may find themselves thinking about declaring bankruptcy, receiving non-judicial punishment for financial mismanagement, or even facing discharge.

Thus, respondents from both stateside and international sites agreed that young Marines often have financial difficulty. These problems are often accompanied by the presence of certain clear indicators of financial mismanagement, including returned checks, new car ownership, high credit indebtedness, and high monthly phone bills. For a few, extremely serious financial consequences may occur. But even those who are not in over their heads are frequently living from paycheck to paycheck, purchasing items that are beyond their means.

#### *Causes of Marines’ Financial Difficulty*

Participants reported a number of factors that seem to contribute to the high levels of financial problems encountered by young Marines and their families.

*Youth* Nearly every person interviewed identified immaturity and lack of experience as primary causes of Marines’ financial problems. Participants noted that young Marines are in a kind of culture shock, having money for the first time with no idea how to manage it. With credit being offered to them from all sides and their friends spending without apparent concern, they believe they can indulge their desire to have expensive new possessions. Unless they learned them at home, most new enlisted personnel enter the military lacking the most fundamental financial skills, such as how to handle a checkbook and how credit cards work. By the time they reach their first duty station, many new Marines are already over their heads in debt.

*Marriage and family* About forty percent (40%) of low rank enlistees are married (Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, 2001). Respondents reported that lower rank newlyweds often find themselves quickly taking on a heavy burden of debt. Even if the spouse works, available jobs tend to be low paying and hard to find; and if there are children the second salary often barely covers childcare. Furthermore, a young spouse, knowing little about how much money is coming in and how the military pay system works, can unwittingly place the Marine’s career in jeopardy by running up high bills. As the number of children in the family increases, there is a greater need for more income, better management skills, or both.

“There is a high correlation between financial problems and domestic problems,” one chaplain noted, and several participants agreed that financial pressures can be a trigger for marital problems. Separation, divorce and the likelihood of abuse are increased in families undergoing financial strain. “The Marine Corps has a higher divorce rate than the other services,” one JAG said. Many respondents stated that the biggest financial problems for married Marines are the cost of divorce, child support, and relocation.

*Isolation* New Marines are often stationed some distance from their families of origin. Away from home and on their own for the first time, young Marines are easily encouraged to purchase expensive items on credit. Chief among these purchases is a car, particularly when the installation at which they are stationed is far from urban centers and/or when the Marine is married and living off-base. Going home for a visit or for an emergency can be extremely expensive. Lonely Marines call their families frequently, running up high phone bills. Furthermore, the more distant the installation is from urban areas, the more difficult it is for spouses to get well-paying jobs or any jobs at all to supplement the family income.

These issues are even more prevalent when Marines are stationed overseas. Marines who are stationed abroad often find that setting up a household can be extremely expensive. Those receiving cost of living allowances (COLAs) are tempted to spend the money for fun things while they're in a new country rather than paying bills. Long-distance charges on calls home can be astronomical. "It is not uncommon for a person making \$1,500 a month to run up a \$2,000 phone bill" said one participant. The late-payment charges on cell-phone calls are an additional expense for which few plan.

*Deployment* Deployment presents the young Marine family with a series of new financial challenges. Unless both Marines and their spouses know how to construct and adhere to a budget, and have planned how two people will safely use one checkbook and the same credit cards, young Marine families can suffer severe financial problems while the Marine is away. Phone bills tend to soar during this time; payments must still be made on the car back home; sudden emergencies force overuse of credit cards. These factors often combine to plummet the family of the deployed Marine into financial disaster.

*Direct deposit* Direct deposit of pay was also identified as a factor contributing to some Marines' inability to keep track of their finances. In the words of one First Sergeant, "Instead of getting paid with checks, cashing them, and knowing exactly what money you have and when it's gone--when you have to eat in the chow hall, etc., you've got direct deposit; you never see the cash. They don't know how much is in their account, they have all these checks and credit cards too."

*Other factors* The need to play the role of "tough" Marine may cause these individuals to maintain an "in-charge" attitude that too often results in keeping emerging financial problems to themselves rather than seeking assistance at early stages, before problems become severe. Concern that discovery by superiors of financial problems will negatively impact their career contributes to the likelihood that young Marines may not seek assistance until the difficulties are overwhelming.

#### *Help currently available*

Participants reported knowledge of several on- and off-base programs and organizations that are currently available to help young Marines with money problems and financial management. These include the Personal Financial Management Program (PFMP) Specialists, Command Financial Specialists (CFS), Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society (NMCRS), and off-base financial assistance from Consumer Credit Counseling Services (CCCS). PFMP specialists are civilian professionals

or NCOs employed by the U.S. Marine Corps to serve as financial counselors and educators. Most participants noted that these individuals are effective; however, many stated that Marines seldom go to see the PFMPs voluntarily. Furthermore, the respondents agreed that Marines are only referred to PFMPs after their financial matters have deteriorated significantly. Most agreed that many of the financial problems enlisted Marines encounter could be reduced or prevented by ensuring that all young enlistees receive early education in financial management from the PFMPs.

Some installations are utilizing Command Financial Specialists (CFSs) who are recruited from within the military and are trained to provide peer financial education and counseling within their units. The benefit of the CFS program is the availability of the trained military member (the CFS) at the work site where the first signs of financial problems usually appear. This permits many problems to be identified and resolved in the early stages before a commanding officer is involved. Where it is used, the program tends to be well regarded. However, the CFS concept is unevenly implemented. On one installation, the base commander was unaware that the program existed and, on several others, the impetus from above necessary for introducing new programs was lacking.

Furthermore, participants noted that the CFS program is not proactive; one said "It helps Marines with financial problems after the fact; CFSs wait for Marines to come to them." It is also difficult to find CFS candidates, since financial counseling is seen as a low priority additional/collateral duty. "The mission takes precedence over everything, even family, so CFS duty is pretty far down the [priority] list. It's a collateral duty and the guy may have two or three collateral duties. It's hard to organize classes under these circumstances, so he just waits till somebody comes to him," a staff sergeant stated.

NMCRS provides a number of services. Emergency food and limited monetary assistance is provided in a crisis, and although educational assistance is usually not available, at some installations, such as Iwakuni, Marines are sent to NMCRS to help them stay on a budget and "get back on track." A limited number of Marines use commercial services such as CCCS when they find themselves in unmanageable debt. However, these services are not available near all Marine Corps installations.

Although the PFMP specialists and CFS programs have the potential of providing early education and continuous preventive assistance to help young Marines and their families learn to successfully live within their financial means, these programs tend to be

used too little and too late. As a result of budgetary limitations, the lack of command support for proactive financial management programs, down-sizing and deployment, resulting in tighter schedules for Marines and less willingness on their part and that of their superiors to take time out to participate in programs not clearly related to the job, existing financial programs such as PFMPs and CFSs are used by Marine families only after financial problems seem to have become virtually insurmountable.

### Conclusions

Young Marine Corps members and their families constitute a population at high risk for financial problems. Personal characteristics of Marines such as their youth and financial inexperience, as well as job-related factors such as isolation and deployment, combine to place the young Marine family at risk for overspending, being targeted by unscrupulous salespersons, and making poor economic and credit decisions. Furthermore, Marine Corps ideals that emphasize being tough and “taking care of your own” contribute to the likelihood that Marines may conceal financial difficulties until they are out of control. The monetary difficulties of young Marine families can negatively affect job performance, military readiness, career advancement, marital relationships, family functioning, friendships, and future financial security.

The PFMP specialist program and the CFS program, where offered, are currently available to help young Marines control their finances. Numerous financial management educational materials are available for use by PFMPs and CFSs to help Marines manage their finances and for use in individual counseling sessions to assist Marines who are experiencing minimal to severe financial difficulty. However, these resources are not being optimally utilized. Too few Marines are contacted for early and continuous financial training, and too many encounter severe monetary problems before going for educational and counseling services.

Recognition of the important contribution of financial well being to families calls for consistent implementation of financial management education programs. For the sake of young military members and their families, programs must be applied proactively rather than reactively, emphasizing the early development of financial management skills. Young people in the military are most often products of a civilian education system that does not provide adequate financial education.

#### *What can be done?*

All participants in the focus groups and individual interviews agreed that young Marines and their dependents are experiencing many more, and more severe, financial problems than they should, and that

these difficulties are having a significant negative effect on Marine families. Respondents agreed that early, mandatory, and career-long financial training is the key to mitigating and preventing extensive financial problems and to improving the financial well being of young Marines and their families. Financial management education should be part of recruit training, as well as being part of Marine education at school and at each duty station. Effective financial education must take into account the personal and career events that impact financial well-being, including marriage, having children, transfers, and deployment (Varcoe, Emper, & Lees, 2002). It was suggested by many that financial education that emphasizes financial security should be part of the Marines career-long education. This would help make financial education proactive rather than reactive and increase the financial well being of all Marines and their families.

### Endnotes

<sup>a</sup>The winMAX<sup>®</sup> program for qualitative data analysis is now distributed as MAXqda and is described at <http://www.maxqda.de/>

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