

**A REVIEW OF UNITED STATES VETERAN OPINIONS OF THE
TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (TAP)**

by

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Don't Quit

*“When things go wrong, as they sometimes will;
When the road you're trudging seems all uphill;
When the funds are low, and debts are high;
And you want to smile but you have to sigh.
When all is pressing you down a bit –
Rest if you must, but don't you quit
Success is failure is turned inside out;
The silver tint on the clouds of doubt;
And you can never tell how close you are;
It may be near when it seems far.
So, stick to the fight when you're hardest hit –
It's when things go wrong that you must not quit.”*
~John Greenleaf Whittier

*“Hope” is the thing with feathers –
That perches in the soul –
And sings the tune without the words –
And never stops – at all – ...
~Emily Dickenson*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

9/11: An abbreviation used to signify the date September 11, 2001, when four suicidal terrorists attacked the United States of America. Terrorists flew two airplanes into the World Trade Center's North and South towers in New York City, one airplane was flown into the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and one crashed into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Approximately 3,000 American's were killed (History.com Editors, 2020).

ABI/Inform: Digital database of journals, working papers, periodicals, and dissertations (ProQuest, LLC, 2023)

AI: Artificial Intelligence (IBM, n.d.)

ALIMS: Aviation Logistics Information Management System (ASVAB CEP, 2023a)

AR: Alternate Reality (Fandom, Inc., 2023)

BDD: Benefits Delivery at Discharge (VA.gov, 2023b)

BMI: Bradley-Morris, Inc. (Bradley-Morris, LLC, 2017)

CAP: Civil Air Patrol (Civil Air Patrol, 2021)

CDC: Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2021)

CFR: Code of Federal Regulations (ECFR.gov, n.d.)

CI: Composite Indicator (Saldner, 2020)

CIF: Central Issue Facility ([AcronymsAndSlang.com](https://www.acronymsandslang.com), 2020).

CITI: Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program, 2023)

CJTF-OIR: Combined Joint Task Force Operation Inherent Resolve is a global coalition with the goal of defeating the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), also known as Da'esh (CJTF-OIR, 2020).

CRS: Career Readiness Standards (Kamarck, 2018)

CTM: Crypto Technician Maintenance (ASVAB CEP, 2023b)

DAV: Disabled American Veterans (DAV.org, 2023)

DCMS: Deputy Commandant for Mission Support (DCMS, n.d.)

DD: Department of Defense (DoD, 2021)

DDR: Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (United Nations, 2020)

DOD: United States Department of Defense (DoD, 2021)

DOLEW: Department of Labor Employment Workshop (DOD-2013-OS-0236, 2015)

EAOS: End of Active Obligated Service (DTIC, 1986)

EBSCO: Elton B. Stephens Company, also known as EBSCO, Inc., a leading provider of research databases for libraries (EBSCO, 2021).

ENPP: Employment Navigator and Partnership Pilot (DoL, n.d.a)

ETS: Expiration Term of Service (American Dream U, 2020)

GED: General Educational Development Test (GED, 2019)

GI: Government Issued (Nix, 2023)

GPS: Goals, Plans, Success (Kamarck, 2018)

HHS: Health and Human Services (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023)

HR: Human Resources (Kenton, 2023)

HT: Hull Technician (USN, 2023)

HUD: Housing and Urban Development (VA.gov, 2012)

IAVA: Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, a post 9/11 Veterans support group (IAVA, n.d.)

ID: Identification (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2023a)

IDP: Individual Development Plan (ARMY, 2023)

IRB: Institutional Review Board (Purdue, 2022)

ISIS: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, also known as Da'esh (CJTF-OIR, 2020; Rand, 2021).

IT: Information Technology (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2023b)

ITP: Individual Transition Plan (DOD-2013-OS-0236, 2015)

MGCFA: Multi Group Confirmatory Factor Analysis (Brown et al., 2017; Saldner, 2020)

MLC: Military Life Cycle Program (Kamarck, 2018)

MOC: Military Occupational Code (Kamarck, 2018)

NDAA: National Defense Authorization Act (Kamarck, 2018)

NVDRS: National Violent Death Reporting System (NVDRS, 2018).

OEF: Operation Enduring Freedom, war in Afghanistan between 10/2001 and 12/2014 (VA.gov, 2021b).

OIF: Operation Iraqi Freedom lasted from 3/2003-11/2011 (VA.gov, 2021b).

OPSEC: Operations Security (NIST, n.d.)

LCSW: Licensed Clinical Social Worker (SWL, 2023)

MOS: Military Occupational Specialty (RecruitMilitary, 2023)

OND: Operation New Dawn occurred from 9/2011-12/2011. Originally called Operation Iraqi Freedom, President Obama changed the name to signify the reduced role the American military played in securing the country (VA.gov, 2021b).

PE: Person-Environment (Sutton, 2023)

PTSD: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (Sparks, 2018)

RAS: Remote Access Service (Salzufer 8, n.d.)

RQ: Research Question (Ratan et al., 2019)

SGLI: Service Group Life Insurance (WEB.mil, n.d.)

SNAP: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (Benefits.gov, n.d.)

SSVF: Supportive Service for Veteran Families (VA.gov, 2012)

TAP: Transition Assistance Program. A cooperative effort between the Veterans Affairs, Homeland Security, the Department of Labor, the Department of Education, the Office of Personnel Management, the Department of Small Business Management, and the Department of Defense (DoL, n.d.b).

TRP: Transition Readiness Program (USMC, n.d.)

UK: United Kingdom (Barr et al., 2021)

UKY: University of Kentucky (UKY, 2023)

UNL: University of Nebraska, Lincoln (UNL, 2019)

UNO: University of Nebraska, Omaha (UNO, 2023)

USA: United States of America (USDS, n.d.)

USAF: United States Air Force (USAF, n.d.)

USC: United States Code (38 USC § 1.15, 1989).

USCG: United States Coast Guard (USCG, n.d.)

USMC: United States Marine Corps (USMC, 2019)

USN: United States Navy (USN, 2022)

VA: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA.gov, n.d.)

VASH: Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VHA Office of Mental Health, 2021)

VFW: Veteran of Foreign Wars (VFW, 2023)

VGLI: Veterans' Group Life Insurance (VA.gov, 2023a)

VHA: Veterans Health Administration (Administration, 2023)

VOW: Veterans Opportunity to Work (Kamarck, 2018)

VPN: Virtual Private Network (Eddy & Stobing, 2023)

VR: Virtual Reality (Sheldon, 2023)

GLOSSARY

Career Readiness Standards: Activities that prepare service members for careers in and out of the military that must be completed (DoD, n.d.a).

Civil Air Patrol: An auxiliary of the United States Air Force (Civil Air Patrol, 2021).

Cold War: A war between the United States and the Soviet Union from 1947 until 1991 when the Soviet Union collapsed (History.com Editors, 2019).

Culture: The learned behavior that depicts the beliefs of a group of people (Dyrenfurth, 2019).

Culturally Disoriented: Also known as culture shock. Occurs when someone is exposed to a new way of thinking, a culture they are not familiar with, or a new way of life (Broussard, 2020).

Delimitations: Parameters or boundaries of the research. What is or is not included (DiscoverPhDs, 2020b).

Dishonorable Discharge: Also known as Less than Honorable Discharge.

Enlistment Contract: A contract with the Armed Forces of the United States of America that includes what branch of the Armed Forces you are joining, the date you are joining, and the date your contract ends, also called DD Form 4 (DoD, 2020).

Gap: When there is information that is missing or insufficient for someone to determine the answer to a question (Robinson et al., 2013).

Gulf War: Also known as the Persian Gulf War which took place in 1990-1991 when Iraq invaded Kuwait (Britannica, 2021).

Habitus: A term from Pierre Bourdieu meaning how a person uses past experiences to determine their behavior in each situation (Cooper et al., 2018).

Honorable Discharge: The highest level of discharge given to service members who have performed their duties in a satisfactory or commendable manner. service members who have completed their enlistment or commission term, or who are being separated from the military due to other authorized reasons such as a family hardship, hardship of military service, or completion of required service time (Federal Register, 2023).

Housing Stability: Affording housing costs providing households a choice of under what circumstances they move (Atkinson & Greer, 2015).

Hysteresis: A term used by Pierre Bourdieu to describe the difficulty someone has when dealing with change, such as when someone who has spent time in the military culture trying to return to civilian culture (Cooper et al., 2018).

Individual Development Plan: A plan to reach short- and long-term career goals (OPM, n.d.).

Less Than Honorable Discharge: See **Dishonorable Discharge**.

Military Life Cycle Program: A transition model for service members to work towards their transition period at the beginning of their military careers (DoD, n.d.b).

Military Occupational Code Crosswalk: A course designed to help service members identify skills and translate them in a way they can be used in civilian jobs (DoL, n.d.b).

Multi-Group Confirmatory Factor Analysis: A study analysis method that helps researchers determine whether survey responses from multiple groups share similar patterns or responses (Brown et al., 2017).

Phenomenology: A category of research that focuses on the lived experiences a person had so researchers can understand the context of the subject's experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019; Qutoshi, 2018; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

Post-Traumatic Stress: Anxiety and fear caused by traumatic events that are not as severe as Post traumatic stress disorder and have not been clinically diagnosed (Bender, 2013).

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: The clinical diagnoses resulting from someone having lived through or witnessing traumatic events (Bender, 2013)

Reintegration: The adjustment of a service member from military culture to home life in a civilian culture (Lightfoot, 2018).

Response Rate: Also called a completion or return rate; The percentage value found by dividing the number of people participating in the survey by the number of people chosen for the sample (Babbie, 2008).

Sample Size: The number of participants involved in the study (IWT, 2008).

Service Member: Someone who is actively serving in the United States Armed Forces (Dept. of Commerce and Insurance, 2007). Also known as military personnel.

Scope: The limitations and boundaries used for the study (DiscoverPhDs, 2020a).

Social Cohesion: Social cohesion is the attitudes and behaviors between individuals, groups, companies, and industries where the standards include trust, acceptance, and a sense of belonging (Chan et al., 2006).

Sleeper Effect: When the increase on the impact of an issue is delayed instead of immediate (Baumeister & Vohs, 2022; Tsai et al., 2020).

Stigma: When a person or group is negatively viewed as being or behaving in a way that is not normal or acceptable in each culture (Acosta et al., 2014; Stone & Stone, 2015).

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Nutrition assistance program run by the federal government to provide benefits for low-income families or individuals, also known as Food Stamps (Benefits.gov, n.d.; USA.gov, 2021).

Symbiosis: A reinforcing relationship where each can bring benefits to the other (APA, 2020; Meyer, 2013).

Transitioning Service Member: An active-duty service member of the United States Armed Forces who has registered for employment services and is within either 12 months of separating from services or is within 24 months of retiring from services (DOLETA, n.d.).

Unemployment Rate: The number of unemployed people as a percentage of the sum of the employed and the unemployed labor force (DoL, 2021b).

Validated Instrument: An instrument that has been tested for trustworthiness, authenticity, and sensitivity (The Joint Commission, n.d.; UCSF, 2021).

Veteran: A former member of the Armed Services who actively served in the military for at least 180 days and was discharged or released from service under conditions that were not dishonorable (Federal Register, 2023; Hooper, 2021).

ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the Transition Assistance Program and its effectiveness in preparing United States Veterans for post-military civilian life. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study combines qualitative and quantitative data collection to provide comprehensive insights into Veterans' transition experiences, needs, and expectations. The research addresses the limited understanding of Veterans' perceptions of the Transition Assistance Program and highlights the need for comprehensive assessment. It includes online questionnaires to capture Veterans' perspectives. Key findings reveal challenges faced by Veterans during transition and emphasize the need for customization and robust resources. Recommendations propose integrating various technologies to aid Veterans during and after their transition. In conclusion, this study illuminates the Transition Assistance Program's efficacy and proposes innovative ways to support Veterans during their transition to civilian life. It provides valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders to enhance Veterans' transition experiences.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Members of the United States armed forces dedicate their lives to safeguarding the nation, often sacrificing quality time with their families. The Transition Assistance Program (TAP) constitutes an indispensable resource meticulously designed to facilitate the reintegration of service members into civilian life, encompassing employment acquisition, financial stability, educational pursuits, and overall well-being (CQ Researcher, 1990).

Despite its honorable intentions, transitioning Veterans encounter formidable challenges during their return to civilian life, underscoring the imperative for an in-depth examination of the efficacy of the Transition Assistance Program (Adams, 2019). Alarming, nearly 44% of Veterans grapple with the complexities of transitioning to civilian life following their honorable discharge, thereby illuminating a substantial cause for concern (Hooper, 2021).

The Department of Defense (DOD) Transition Assistance Program has undertaken comprehensive studies centered on Veterans afflicted by post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Nevertheless, there remains a notable void in comprehending the holistic effectiveness of the Transition Assistance Program for former service members. In the context of this study, the term 'service member' pertains to individuals presently serving in the United States Military, while 'Veteran' designates individuals who have honorably concluded their service (Hooper, 2021). In recognition of the significance attributed to the title 'Veteran,' it is capitalized throughout this paper to pay homage to those who have earned this distinction (AP Style Guide, 2019; Roman, 2022; Simkins, 2020).

Employing a mixed-methodological approach, which seamlessly incorporates quantitative and qualitative data collection methodologies, this research sought to delve into the experiences of post-9/11 United States Veterans who have actively engaged with the Transition Assistance Program as they navigate the intricacies of transitioning out of the military (Creswell, 2015; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2015; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017; Zohrabi, 2013).

The objective of this study revolves around an exploration of how United States Veterans feel about the adequacy of military transition courses in addressing their multifaceted needs and expectations. By gaining a nuanced understanding of this process, this study aimed to identify potential gaps between the curricular content of transition courses and the pragmatic exigencies of civilian life. The scrutiny of these discrepancies holds the potential to furnish invaluable insights for both civilian and military leadership, thereby facilitating the identification of areas that might be inadvertently overlooked from the vantage point of Veterans' perspectives (Robinson et al., 2013).

Data for this comprehensive research undertaking was meticulously collected through an online questionnaire. All personally identifiable information was safeguarded with utmost confidentiality, strictly adhering to the protocols stipulated by Purdue University's Institutional Review Board (FDA, 2019; HHS, 1979; PU, 2021).

Statement of the Problem

United States Veterans play a vital role in American society (Wollman, 2019). Annually, in excess of 200,000 military service personnel undergo the transformative process of transitioning to civilian life, representing a significant moment in their life journey (VA.gov, 2020). The transition from military service to civilian life ideally constitutes a seamless and prosperous endeavor. However, a noteworthy study conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2011 unveiled a significant challenge, revealing that 44% of post-9/11 Veterans encountered formidable obstacles during their reintegration into civilian life (Morin, 2011). Building upon this, a collaborative study in 2012 by Prudential and the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) illuminated that nearly two-thirds of those separating from military service grappled with the complexities of their transition (IAVA & Prudential, 2012).

Subsequent research emanating from this endeavor highlighted that job procurement posed the most formidable hurdle for transitioning Veterans (IAVA & Prudential, 2012). Despite the Transition Assistance Program containing 280 potential steps within its purview, investigations conducted by the Defense Health Agency of the United States Department of Defense revealed that Veterans continue to encounter heightened difficulties in securing gainful employment compared to their non-Veteran counterparts (Fraynt et al., 2018). Furthermore, recently separated

Veterans grapple with the intricate task of translating their military experiences and competencies into civilian-appropriate language for inclusion in their resumes (VA.gov, 2015b).

Regrettably, some Veterans, grappling with the stress associated with this transition, resort to extreme measures, underscoring the dire necessity for effective support mechanisms (Eckmann, 2020; Morin, 2011; Shane, 2022; Zogas, 2017). Statistics pertaining to Veteran suicides in 2019 exhibit variances, with reported figures ranging from 17 per day, as per the Veterans Administration, to 44 per day, according to a study conducted by America's Warrior Partnership (America's Warrior Partnership, 2022; Shane, 2022; VA, 2021). These disconcerting statistics accentuate the paramount importance of addressing potential deficiencies within the Transition Assistance Program, originally conceived to furnish aid encompassing employment, financial stability, educational pursuits, and overall well-being for Veterans.

The participants in this study are United States Veterans honorably discharged or retired after September 11, 2001, when terrorists attacked the World Trade Centers in New York City, referred to as 9/11. The significance of surveying Veterans who transitioned out after the 9/11 terrorist attacks lies in the unique historical context created by this event (History.com Editors, 2020). These attacks were a pivotal moment in U.S. history, leading to a substantial increase in military enlistments as the nation responded to the threat of terrorism and engaged in conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq as part of the broader War on Terror (Burns, 2020). What sets this era apart was the fundamentally different nature of the ensuing conflicts (Burns, 2020). Unlike previous conflicts, such as the Vietnam War or the Gulf War, the post-9/11 wars were characterized by extended and multiple deployments, varying lengths of service, and an evolving role for the National Guard (Institute of Medicine, 2010; Neumann et al., 2005; SAMHSA, 2021). These factors created a unique military experience for those who served during this period. Veterans transitioning from military service post-9/11 confronted distinctive challenges and experiences based upon their military service. These challenges encompassed the adaptation to civilian life, grappling with the repercussions of multiple deployments, and contending with a civilian society that may not comprehensively appreciate their experiences. The survey of Veterans from this specific timeframe serves to furnish insights into the particular challenges and requisites of this group, thereby shedding light on how the historical situation and the nature of the War on Terror influenced their transition experiences, encompassing issues pertaining to employment, mental

well-being, and social integration (Bonanno et al., 2012; Interian et al., 2014; Milstein et al., 2021; Moore et al., 2017; Sayer et al., 2010; Street et al., 2009). The conceptualization of the Transition Assistance Program was centered upon the betterment of the problems associated with transition and the delivery of personalized resources for this distinctive demographic (Adams, 2019).

Researcher's Personal Connection to the Topic

The researcher's personal connection to the military, shaped by a family history interwoven with service, from a mother's role in the civilian auxiliary service Civil Air Patrol (CAP) (Civil Air Patrol, 2021) to a child's active duty as a Marine, is further deepened by a past marital alliance to a Navy Seabee. This confluence of military associations has endowed the researcher with a unique perspective on the multifaceted challenges faced by service members during transition to civilian life. Exposure to disheartening media portrayals of Veterans grappling with inadequate support, resulting in homelessness, psychological distress, or in extreme cases, suicide, has fortified the researcher's resolve to investigate and advocate for robust transition assistance. This personal investment fuels a passion for understanding and enhancing the mechanisms that support Veterans' transitions, ensuring they are equipped with necessary resources to navigate post-military life successfully after serving their country.

Research Questions & Hypotheses

The transition from a military to civilian life constitutes a challenging phase for service members and Veterans. However, a notable research gap exists concerning the support mechanisms available to assist them during this pivotal period. In response to this research gap, this study endeavors to address the following inquiries:

- What were the Veteran's expectations for the Transition Assistance Program?
- Were the Veteran's expectations for the content of the Transition Assistance Program courses met?
- What expectations were not met, if any?

- Do Veterans feel they were given the tools needed to successfully return to civilian life?
- What parts of the course did Veterans find most beneficial?
- Do Veterans propose suggestions for enhancing the Transition Assistance Program?

The formulated hypotheses guiding this investigation are articulated as follows:

$H1_0 = \text{Transition Assistance Program does not meet Veteran needs}$

$H1_1 = \text{Transition Assistance Program meets Veteran needs}$

$H2_0 = \text{Transition Assistance Program does not meet Veteran expectations}$

$H2_1 = \text{Transition Assistance Program meets Veteran expectations}$

The concept of Veteran needs encompasses psychologist Abraham Maslow's hierarchy, spanning from fundamental physiological and safety needs to more elevated facets such as self-esteem and self-actualization (Gepp, 2022; *Maslow's Hierarchy of Basic Needs*, 2011). Figure 1 visually interprets the hierarchical nature of these needs, underscoring their interrelatedness. The fulfillment of these requisites was pivotal for both Veterans and non-Veterans in becoming productive members of society.

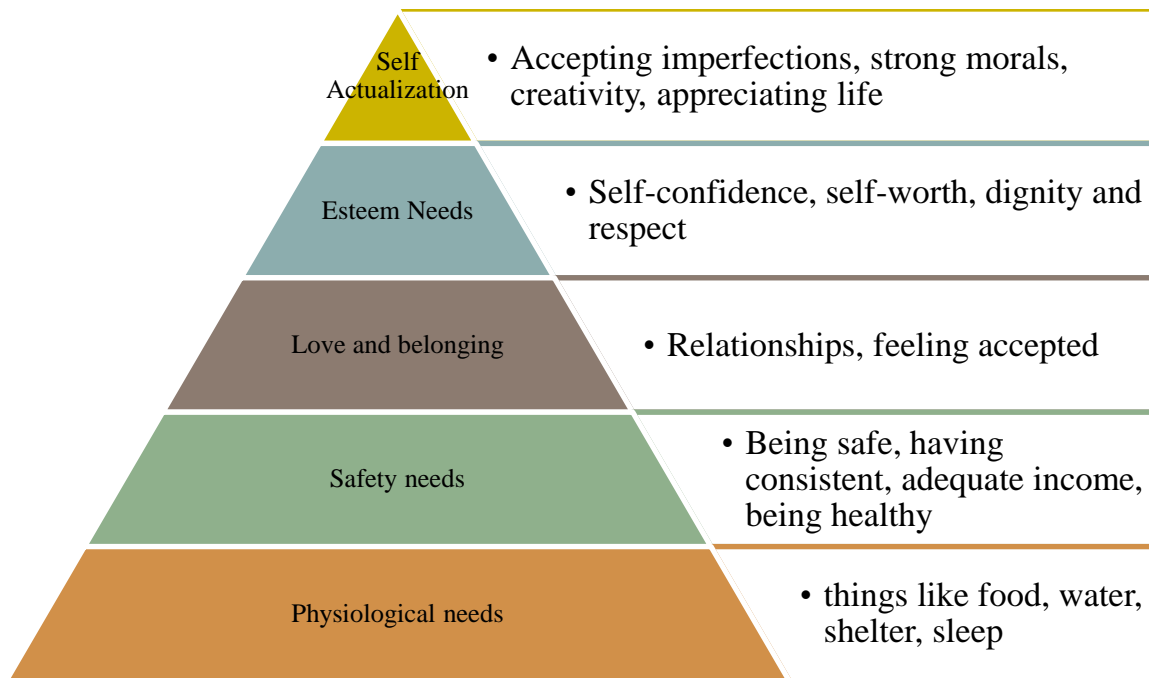


Figure 1. Based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

This research employed a mixed-methods approach, engaging study participants who are United States Veterans having transitioned from military service after September 11, 2001. This focus ensures homogeneity of directives across the participant cohort (Creswell, 2015; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The primary aim of this study was to discern the underlying causes of the challenges encountered by numerous military Veterans in their reintegration into civilian life after their participation in a branch-specific Transition Assistance Program.

The study's range encompassed a distribution of participants drawn from four of the five branches that comprise the United States Armed Services and mirror the demographic distribution reported by the Veterans Administration in 2022: 47% from the Army, 23% from the Navy, 19% from the Air Force, and 12% from the Marines (Office of Policy and Planning, 2010). Data collection was facilitated through an online questionnaire meticulously implementing stringent safeguards to preserve the confidentiality of all personally identifiable information.

Significance of the Problem

The Veterans Assistance Program assumes a pivotal role in facilitating the career transitions of Veterans, offering a range of initiatives, notably the Employment Navigator and Partnership Pilot

(ENPP) (DoL, n.d.a). Operational from spring 2021 to spring 2022, the Employment Navigator and Partnership Pilot was strategically implemented in select locations, guiding Veterans through the intricate terrain of career exploration (DoL, n.d.a). Through the medium of self-assessments, the Employment Navigator and Partnership program adeptly aids service members in discerning their career preferences and proficiencies (DoL, 2021a). This discernment process facilitates the harmonization of vocational aspirations and skill sets, thereby empowering Veterans to effectively target fitting occupational roles within the civilian workforce (DoL, 2021b).

Supplementing this complex support structure are financial planning and literacy workshops, thoughtfully administered by the Transition Assistance Program (DCMS, n.d.). By furnishing Veterans with the requisite tools and insights for judicious financial planning in the civilian environment, these workshops impart the wisdom necessary for securing their financial futures (DCMS, n.d.). To further enrich the transition experience, the pursuit of higher education within an environment reminiscent of the military ethos can function as a bridge, potentially mitigating the challenges associated with reintegration into civilian life (Ziencik, 2020). Furthermore, service members are equipped with an array of resources and strategies aimed at safeguarding and enhancing their overall well-being upon their reentry into civilian society (DCMS, n.d.; Ziencik, 2020).

Statement of Purpose

While investigating the satisfaction levels of Veterans concerning the Transition Assistance Program, a conspicuous research gap became evident within the existing literature. This research project seeks to delve deeper into the multifaceted transition process, with a particular emphasis on discerning the precise points of disparity between transition courses and civilian life, as perceived by Veterans. It is imperative to note that a conspicuous absence prevails with regard to an evaluative mechanism to assess the efficacy of the Transition Assistance Program (Bascetta, 2002).

As of 2019, the United States boasted a Veteran population in excess of 17 million individuals, comprising those who have devoted a portion of their lives to the honorable task of safeguarding the nation's freedom (US Census Bureau, 2019). Unraveling the underlying factors contributing to Veterans' problems during the process of reintegration into civilian life possesses the potential to

empower both military and civilian leadership in bridging this gap, thereby facilitating an enhanced support system for Veterans. The challenges confronted by Veterans encompass the intricate task of reestablishing familial bonds, securing gainful employment, forging social connections, adeptly managing financial resources, and contending with an increased vulnerability to substance addiction (Patterson, 2020; Shepherd et al., 2021; VA.gov, 2020). However, current studies on transitioning difficulties primarily center on post-traumatic stress disorder, inadvertently overlooking other potential factors (Mobbs & Bonanno, 2018).

The envisaged outcomes of this study hold the promise of contributing significantly to the field by pinpointing noticeable disparities between Transition Assistance Program courses and the authentic experiences encountered within civilian culture. Furthermore, this study adopts a carefully balanced mixed-methods approach, seamlessly integrating both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, in alignment with the recommendations set forth by Creswell (2015). This multifaceted approach was deemed necessary for a comprehensive exploration of the intricate terrain of Veterans' transition experiences.

Additional scholarly works focused on military transitioning and the efficacy of the Transition Assistance Program lend support to this research endeavor, as reflected in the works of Adams (2019), Hall (2017), Hogan (2016), Jordan (2019), Wagner (2019), and Whitworth et al. (2020). As aptly stated, "Research is to generate more knowledge and understanding" (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020, p. 6).

Assumptions

In this study, a set of underlying assumptions establishes the foundation upon which the research was conducted. It was anticipated that all participating Veterans will candidly respond to the qualifying questions, offering forthright viewpoints on the Transition Assistance Program survey. This collective candor was crucial in upholding the integrity of the data collection process. These assumptions underscore the study's unwavering dedication to comprehending the viewpoints of Veterans with transparency and openness.

Limitations

Limitations or weaknesses in this study include but are not limited to acquaintance bias, flawed responses, using web-based surveys to reach participants, the researcher's skill, the amount of time it takes to conduct the study, the response rate, and sample size, or the number of participants involved in the study. Each factor carries the potential to influence the study's validity, reliability, and generalizability (Creswell, 2015).

Acquaintance Bias

A limitation in this study was the potential for acquaintance bias. If study participants are personally acquainted with the researcher, there may be a tendency to provide answers that align with presumed expectations, compromising the objectivity and trustworthiness of the data collected (Smith & Noble, 2014). To mitigate this bias, Creswell & Poth (2018) advise the use of triangulation, where the online survey data was compared to other data sources to validate findings. Ethical considerations, like obtaining informed consent and ensuring anonymity are also crucial for reducing any potential bias and insuring data integrity (Creswell, 2012). By adopting these strategies, both credibility and reliability of the online survey data can be enhanced. However, the presence of acquaintance bias remains a constraint that may affect the generalizability and validity of the study's conclusions (Malterud, 2001).

Participant Honesty

Participants providing inaccurate or untruthful responses can alter the outcome of a study (Fowler, 2009; Kennedy & Vargus, 2001). The inaccurate responses could result from survey questions being misunderstood or participants answering the way they believe the researcher wants them to (Infosurv Editor, 2016).

Challenges of Web-Based Surveys

Using a web-based survey was limiting due to difficulties reaching a large number of the target audience (Kennedy & Vargus, 2001). Concerns about the link and the website working properly, or the link being misspelled when shared or typed into the web browser will affect the participants ability to access the survey.

Researcher's Skill and Time Constraints

A new researcher's skill was a limitation that may be supplemented with guidance from professors at Purdue University (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Conducting research studies by survey can be a time-consuming process resulting in limitations depending on the amount of time available to conduct a study.

Response Rate

A critical limitation centers on the challenge of securing high response rates. The rate of participation directly correlates with the study's validity and its generalizability to broader contexts (Creswell, 2015; Fowler, 2009). Optimal situations would yield high response rates, for example, 95 out of 100 possible respondents. Such robust participation minimizes bias, enhancing the reliability of the study's findings (Babbie, 2008; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The spectrum for response rates in mixed-methods surveys is notably wide, ranging from a low of 3% to a high of 61% (Booker et al., 2021). Low response rates affect the study's generalizability (Creswell, 2015). To mitigate the risks of low participation, specific strategies can be employed. These may include targeted outreach to the study population, the use of validated survey instruments for increased credibility, and ensuring easy access to the survey to reduce barriers to participation (Booker et al., 2021).

Sample Size and Subject Pool

The indeterminate nature of the sample size poses another limitation and will remain so until data collection concludes. According to Creswell, using a sampling error formula is advised for establishing an adequate sample size (Creswell, 2012). In the context of this research, the formula indicates that a minimum of 250 participants would be required to achieve an 80% consistency rating. It is important to note that there is no one-size-fits-all number for sample sizes in qualitative research. Some studies suggest that even a small sample size, ranging from 5 to 25, is adequate for in-depth analysis (Hall, 2017). Others propose that at least 10 participants is suitable for qualitative validity (Hart, 2018). Overall, the sample size would affect the depth of understanding possible and the point at which data saturation would be reached.

Transparency and Minimized Open-Ended Questions

Limitations that could occur by using personal connections causing acquaintance bias and affecting the honesty of the answers provided were reduced by providing transparency and minimizing the number of open-ended questions within the survey (Toor, 2020).

Emotional and Psychological Stress Considerations

Surveying Veterans on sensitive topics risks causing emotional and psychological stress, potentially affecting data quality. Emotional reactions can include heightened anxiety and traumatic re-experience, while psychological burden can introduce response bias (LaChenaye & McCarthy, 2022). The multi-layered impact of emotional and psychological factors, such as anxiety, depression, mental fatigue, and re-traumatization, requires careful consideration. These factors compromise not only ethical standards but also data integrity (Crow et al., 2006; Qualtrics, 2023). Implementing trauma-informed approaches was crucial for mitigating these risks and ensuring reliable data (Price et al., n.d.; Wilder Research, 2016).

Delimitations

This study does not cover directives on changing the Transition Assistance Program. Participants included are solely Veterans transitioning out of service post September 11, 2001. Veterans receiving ongoing medical or mental health care stemming from their service are excluded to ensure their specialized needs are adequately addressed. The mixed methods design employed here was specific to exploring lived experiences of Veterans (Qutoshi, 2018).

Notably, age and duration of military service are not variables in this study. The exclusive focus rests in assessing the Transition Assistance Program's post-2001 effectiveness. Therefore, these factors are not expected to influence the study's outcomes.

Due to the Coast Guard's dual role as part of both the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security it was excluded from this study. According to the U.S. Coast Guard (2014), unlike the other military branches, Coast Guard members may have duties tied to law enforcement, maritime security, and search and rescue, among others. These unique responsibilities might skew the survey results or necessitate additional variables, complicating the study's design and interpretation. Therefore, their exclusion ensures a more homogeneous sample, allowing for a

focused analysis on the Transition Assistance Program's efficacy for the majority of service branches (U.S. Coast Guard, 2014).

Conclusion

This study aims to evaluate Veterans opinions about the efficacy of the Transition Assistance Program in preparing U.S. Veterans for post-military civilian life. The mixed-method approach involves a minimum sample of 10 Veterans, unrestricted by age, gender, or ethnicity, to gauge whether the program met their needs and expectations. Data was collected through online questionnaires, utilizing validated instruments to capture the lived experiences from the Veterans' perspectives.

For clarity, the survey questions have been designed to directly address the study's hypotheses. For example, questions concerning financial preparedness (Survey Question 2) and the value of non-government transition programs (Survey Question 3) align with the hypothesis that the Transition Assistance Program may lack comprehensive resources for transitioning Veterans.

Response rates for mixed-methods surveys can vary widely, from 3% to 61% (Booker et al., 2021). To mitigate the risk of a low response rate, the study will employ a validated instrument and ensure easy access to the survey (Jones et al., 2013). While qualitative studies typically range from 5 to 25 participants (Hall, 2017), due to time constraints and the focus on obtaining quality insights, this study aims for a minimum of 10 participants.

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter Overview

Effectively navigating the intricate transition from military to civilian life poses a critical and often underestimated challenge with profound implications for Veterans. This literature review initiates a meticulous analytical exploration, combining the dispersed body of knowledge relevant to the Transition Assistance Program and related initiatives. The purview of this review encompasses a range of aspects, spanning employment, mental health, and social reintegration, with a focus on discerning the alignment of these programs with the multifaceted needs and expectations of Veterans.

The Transition Assistance Program was developed to provide comprehensive support to service members of the United States Military as they prepare for civilian life (CQ Researcher, 1990). Additionally, elective courses are available for individuals interested in pursuing higher education or embarking on entrepreneurial ventures (DoD, 2013; Santella, 2020; Wagner, 2019). Upon the program's conclusion, a Capstone event assesses the extent to which service members are adequately prepared for their transition into the civilian sector, offering supplementary support as deemed necessary (Kamarck, 2018; USCG, n.d.).

Despite the well-structured framework of the Transition Assistance Program, its efficacy remains a matter of ongoing debate. Skeptics raise questions regarding whether the program genuinely facilitates a successful transition for Veterans or if it merely fulfills bureaucratic requisites (Wagner, 2019). As underscored by multiple studies, the challenges inherent in this transition can yield dire consequences, encompassing adverse effects on employment prospects, mental well-being, and, alarmingly, homelessness (Burns, 2020; Castro, 2017; Cooper et al., 2018; Elnitsky et al., 2017).

This chapter attempts to address current gaps within the existing body of research concerning the Veterans opinions of the effectiveness of the Transition Assistance Program. Existing studies have offered diverse recommendations, ranging from practical guidance on preparing for civilian life to strategic enhancements of transitional programs. Through a systematic examination of these

studies, this chapter concludes in a comprehensive discussion of recurring themes, unresolved questions, and lays the groundwork for focused future inquiries.

The overarching objective of this literature review was to systematically compile published information related to the United States Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program. This review aims to discuss the rationale behind the Transition Assistance Program's inception, its design to smooth the transition of United States Military service members, and the perceptions of Veterans regarding the Transition Assistance Program's efficacy. Specifically, it seeks to determine whether Veterans feel the Transition Assistance Program effectively facilitates reintegration into civilian life or if its implementation merely satisfies departmental requirements (Wagner, 2019). Given the potential repercussions of transitioning challenges, including employment difficulties, mental health issues, and homelessness, it is imperative to establish robust support mechanisms to ensure that no Veteran is left behind (Burns, 2020; Castro, 2017; Cooper et al., 2018; Elnitsky et al., 2017). The core question revolves around whether Veterans perceive that the Program fulfills its intended purpose (CQ Researcher, 1990). To conduct this literature review Google, Google Scholar, Purdue University's online library including 727 databases such as ABI/Inform, EBSCO, Gale Access, Military and Government Collection, PsychINFO were used.

This undertaking transcends the confines of a mere literature review; its broader purpose was to serve as a catalyst for informed change. Recognizing the pivotal role played by Veterans in our society, it assumes the status of a social imperative to facilitate their seamless reintegration into civilian life. Through the systematic analysis of existing knowledge, this review endeavors to furnish a comprehensive academic study that yields practical insights, thereby bridging extant knowledge gaps and paving the way for future research avenues. The resultant holistic comprehension serves as a foundation for collaborative efforts among stakeholders to cultivate an environment where Veterans not only reintegrate but thrive in civilian life.

Origin of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP)

In the late 1980s, as the Cold War drew to a close, a substantial downsizing of military forces by 53,800 positions, coupled with a further reduction of 19,000 positions in selected reserve forces, occurred (CQ Researcher, 1990). The significant influx of Veterans transitioning into the civilian

workforce prompted the United States Congress to establish a comprehensive training program aimed at assisting military families in anticipating their needs and equipping them with tools to facilitate a seamless transition (US Army, 2021). Following the successful execution of five pilot sites in 1990 to substantiate the program's necessity, Congress enshrined the Transition Assistance Program within the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 1991 through Public Law 101-510, with a primary focus on aiding Veterans (101st Congress, 1990; APM, 2022; US Army, 2021). The Transition Assistance Program continued to be a focal point in Congressional considerations, particularly for combat-experienced Veterans.

It is noteworthy that each branch of the military mandates program participation for Veterans, aiming to facilitate successful reintegration into civilian life. This broad support framework encompasses activities such as assisting Veterans in discerning their life's purpose, enabling their pursuit of higher education, aiding them in securing gainful employment, assisting in the reestablishment of familial and social relationships, aiding in the search for suitable housing, facilitating access to healthcare services, and navigating the complex landscape of Veterans' benefits (Bascetta, 2002; Gettings et al., 2019; Wagner, 2019). The Gulf War, spanning the period from August 1990 onwards, witnessed the service of over 3.7 million Veterans (Sayer et al., 2010; US Census Bureau, 2019). Gulf War Veterans confront myriad challenges in their efforts to reintegrate into civilian life, including the formidable tasks of rebuilding familial connections, securing gainful employment, establishing social networks, managing financial resources, and grappling with the risk of substance addiction (Patterson, 2020; Shepherd et al., 2021; Wagner, 2019). Notably, extant studies predominantly focus on transitioning difficulties related to post-traumatic stress disorder, inadvertently sidelining other potential contributing factors (Mobbs & Bonanno, 2018).

By cultivating a deeper understanding of the challenges experienced by Veterans in transitioning back to civilian life, both military and civilian leaders can take proactive measures to address the gaps within the Transition Assistance Program. These endeavors hold the potential to enhance society's treatment of Veterans and foster more efficacious transitions.

The United States is home to a Veteran population exceeding 17 million individuals, each of whom has dedicated a portion of their lives to the noble task of safeguarding America's freedom (US

Census Bureau, 2019). Sayer et al. (2010) underscores the desire of Veterans for additional information or interventions to aid in their adjustment to civilian life.

Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) to Hire Heroes Act of 2011

In 2011, the United States Congress passed the Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) to Hire Heroes Act, a pivotal legislative milestone in the realm of Veteran support and transition assistance (Bascetta, 2002; Kamarck, 2018; Martensen, 2021; Wagner, 2019). This landmark legislation mandated the establishment of a pre-separation program for all active-duty service members who had rendered at least 180 days of continuous service. It stipulated that service members commence the Transition Assistance Program either 24 months prior to their retirement or 12 months before the conclusion of their enlistment contract. Furthermore, the legislation mandated that the Transition Assistance Program be completed at least 90 days prior to the service members' discharge date (Bascetta, 2002; Kamarck, 2018). This extended preparation period was designed to afford service members ample time to mentally acclimate themselves to the profound cultural shift from the highly structured military environment to civilian life (Alonso et al., 2021; Bledsoe, 2022). Recommendations underscored the importance of service members dedicating a minimum of one year to prepare for their transition into the civilian workforce (Alonso et al., 2021). However, a recent report by the Government Accountability Office reveals that, despite the requirement for pre-separation counseling to commence a year before military departure, a significant proportion of transitioning service members, approximately 70%, commence Transition Assistance Program classes within a year of departing the military (Shane, 2023)

During the Obama Administration in 2011, a pivotal task force was convened to implement a comprehensive restructuring of the Transition Assistance Program (Edwards, 2015). Termed the Veterans' Employment Initiative Task Force, this collaborative endeavor brought together key stakeholders, including the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of Defense, to revamp the program. The reconfigured program, aptly named Transition Goals, Plans, Success (GPS), incorporated a novel Military Life Cycle Program (MLC) element, designed to assist service members in charting their military careers and aligning them with their civilian-life aspirations (DoD, n.d.b). The Military Life Cycle Program is a self-paced, topic-segmented program accessible throughout a military career, explaining the various services and benefits

offered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA.gov, 2021a). It also emphasizes Career Readiness Standards (CRSs) that must be met prior to service members' departure, affording them an opportunity to tailor their individual development plans (Bascetta, 2002; DoD, n.d.b). In addition, Congress expanded the range of counseling topics encompassed within Transition Goals, Plans, Success (Kamarck, 2018).

Annually, approximately 200,000 service members, spanning both active-duty personnel and reservists, transition out of the military (Adams, 2019; Bascetta, 2002; Santella, 2020; Wagner, 2019). These transitioning service members bring with them a diverse array of skills acquired through military training (Bascetta, 2002; Kamarck, 2018). Regardless of their unique skill sets, all service members are mandated to complete reintegration courses, which equip them with the tools to find their life purpose, cultivate meaningful relationships, secure housing, and employment, pursue educational opportunities, access healthcare services, and comprehend the intricacies of Veterans benefits, all prior to their discharge. While attendance at the Transition Assistance Program is obligatory, reported compliance rates exhibit a notable range, spanning from 47% to 97% (Kamarck, 2018). The lower end of this spectrum has been attributed to duty-related or mission-specific requirements, as well as service members receiving notice of their imminent separation date (Kamarck, 2018).

Commencing in 2013, Congress initiated a two-year trial of the Off-Base Transition Training Course, which provided the Transition Assistance Program within a community setting for service members and their spouses. These workshops accommodated approximately a dozen participants per session (Kamarck, 2018). The trial received favorable evaluations from attendees, potentially furnishing an alternative avenue for course participation, thereby catering to the diverse needs of Veterans (Kamarck, 2018).

2016 Regulatory Measures

In 2016, the Department of Defense (DOD) implemented regulations that institutionalized the Veterans Opportunity to Work Act of 2011. These regulations made it mandatory for transitioning service members to participate in the Department of Labor Employment Workshop (DOLEW), introduced the Transition Goals, Plans, Success (Transition GPS) program, mandated the creation of an Individual Transition Plan (ITP), required tracking of course attendance, enforced adherence

to the Career Readiness Standards for members, and established the creation of a capstone document for instructor accountability and member reference (DOD-2013-OS-0236, 2015; Interim Final Rule, 2015). These regulations are codified in 32 CFR Part 88, also identified as Docket ID: DOD-2013-OS-0236, detailed below. The implementation of these regulations significantly improved the transition process and has the potential to enhance program outcomes through data collection and analysis (DOD-2013-OS-0236, 2015).

Regulations Governing the Transition Assistance Program

The document identified as "DOD-2013-OS-0236-0001" comprises a set of regulations promulgated by the Department of Defense pursuant to 32 CFR Part 88, as articulated in the Interim Final Rule of 2015 (Interim Final Rule, 2015). This regulatory document serves as a foundational framework, explaining policies, assigning responsibilities, and prescribing procedures for the administration of the Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program.

Within the purview of the above-mentioned "DOD-2013-OS-0236-0001" document, several significant aspects of the Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program are explained. Firstly, the program's foremost objective revolves around preparing eligible members of the Military Services for a seamless and prosperous transition into civilian life, underscored by the attainment of Career Readiness Standards. Secondly, the Transition Assistance Program incorporates an extensive spectrum of training and informational resources, encompassing career planning, educational pursuits, job search strategies, entrepreneurship endeavors, and more. Thirdly, within the Transition Assistance Program is an important suite of educational materials and courses collectively referred to as Transition GPS. These offerings comprise distinct tracks catering to Accessing Higher Education, Career Technical Training, and Entrepreneurship. Fourthly, the document mandates specific requisites in accordance with the Veterans Opportunity to Work (VOW) Act, mandating pre-separation counseling, Veterans Affairs Benefits Briefings, and Department of Labor Employment Workshops (DOLEW) for service members transitioning from active duty. Lastly, meticulous attention is devoted to the Capstone process, which entails the review and verification of a Service member's Individual Transition Plan (ITP) and Career Readiness Standards.

The document designated as "DOD-2013-OS-0236-0001" holds profound significance, chiefly due to its role in institutionalizing the regulations and procedures governing the Transition Assistance Program. It serves as a guarantor that departing service members are afforded comprehensive training and support, thereby enhancing their prospects of achieving a successful reintegration into civilian society.

This document carries far-reaching implications, both for the Transition Assistance Program itself and for the Veterans it serves. It exemplifies the Department of Defense's unwavering commitment to furnishing robust support throughout the transition process, with a pivotal emphasis on career readiness and the furnishing of Veterans with the requisite skills and knowledge to thrive. The obligatory requirements established by the VOW Act ensure that all eligible service members undergo essential pre-separation counseling and receive extensive education regarding Veterans Affairs benefits and employment opportunities, thereby empowering Veterans to make well-informed post-military career decisions. The provision of individualized tracks within the program acknowledges and accommodates the diverse aspirations of Veterans, offering tailor-made support. The Capstone verification process conveys a commitment to accountability, serving the interests of service members and the Department of Defense alike, with the objective of guaranteeing that Veterans receive requisite assistance in surmounting any challenges that may impede the realization of their career aspirations.

In summation, "DOD-2013-OS-0236-0001" occupies a pivotal role in guiding the implementation of the Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, accentuating the program's dedication to supporting Veterans during their transition and shaping the nature of the assistance offered as they embark upon their civilian careers.

Varying Needs

The Transition Assistance Program exhibits a degree of flexibility across military branches, allowing for customization to cater to the unique needs of their respective service members (Bascetta, 2002). This adaptability empowers military branches to engage contractors in the facilitation of the Transition Assistance Program workshops focused on employment preparedness, thus extending the scope of services available to transitioning service members. These workshops, varying in duration from one to five days each, serve as a crucial component of the program.

The utilization of contractors also affords the option of conducting individual pre-separation counseling sessions, as opposed to group counseling, thereby enabling a more targeted approach to addressing the specific needs of service members (Bascetta, 2002). Such individualized counseling sessions allow for a heightened level of attention to be dedicated to areas that require focused assistance (American Addiction Centers Editorial Staff, 2022; Center for Mental Wellness, 2019). Moreover, the program's flexibility extends to the capacity of training locations to furnish more in-depth information when deemed necessary (Bascetta, 2002). However, it is important to note that reluctance on the part of commanders to accommodate service members transitioning out of service can directly impact these individuals' access to the services offered within the Transition Assistance Program (Bascetta, 2002).

Within society, there is a prevailing sentiment that the nation bears a responsibility to ensure the successful transition of its Veterans back into civilian life as an expression of gratitude for their role in defending the nation (Santella, 2020).

It is noteworthy that each branch of the United States Armed Forces employs a distinct nomenclature for their respective iterations of the Transition Assistance Program (Alonso et al., 2021; Hall, 2017; Hooper, 2021):

- Army: Soldier for Life-Transition Assistance Program (US Army, 2022)
- Navy: Transition Goals, Plans, Success (GPS) (USN, 2022)
- Air Force: Transition Assistance Program (TAP) (USAF, n.d.)
- Marines: Transition Readiness Program (TRP) (USMC, n.d.)
- Coast Guard: Transition Assistance Program (Military.com, 2021).

- Note: The Coast Guard is excluded from the primary scope of this study.

It is important to acknowledge that there exist other military-to-civilian transitioning programs beyond the scope of this study.

Martensen (2021) underscored that the effectiveness of the Transition Assistance Program hinges upon the proficiency of the instructors delivering the program and the proactive involvement of service members in formulating plans for their post-transition endeavors.

Regulatory Framework

Regulation 38 USC 1.15, established in 1989, imposes a mandatory requirement on the Department of Veterans Affairs to conduct continuous evaluations of all its programs (38 USC § 1.15, 1989). The primary objective of these evaluations is to scrutinize the effectiveness of each program in terms of goal attainment and cost-efficiency. It is noteworthy that the evaluations are to be carried out by the Department of Veterans Affairs staff, and this staff should belong to an organizational entity distinct from the one responsible for the administration of the program under evaluation. This distinction is essential to ensure impartiality, objectivity, and the provision of comprehensive details that can inform decision-making processes.

Furthermore, the regulation stipulates that each program's evaluation must align with the original legislative intent that supports it. This alignment necessitates the establishment of well-defined, specific, and measurable goals, as well as the development of a robust method for ascertaining whether these objectives have been successfully achieved. The outcomes of these evaluations are required to be reported to Congress and made accessible to the public.

The process of evaluation entails the formulation of a comprehensive plan that meticulously outlines the objectives, methodology, allocation of resources, and timeline. Additionally, the research design should comprehensively address both the contemporary challenges within the program being evaluated and the broader context of the Department of Veterans Affairs. These evaluations place a strong emphasis on statistical validity and reliability to ensure the integrity of their findings.

The ultimate evaluation report undergoes a rigorous internal review within the Department of Veterans Affairs. In the event of any disagreements arising during this review process, the responsibility for resolution falls to the Secretary of the Department. Finally, the findings of these evaluations are intended to be fully integrated into the Department of Veterans Affairs' plans and budget submissions to the greatest extent possible.

Cultural Shifts in Transition: Navigating Military and Civilian Realities

The process of transitioning from the highly structured military culture to the less regimented civilian world is a complex and challenging journey that often induces feelings of disorientation and uncertainty (Kamal, 2021; Sylvester, 2018). In any given society, various distinct cultures coexist, each characterized by its unique beliefs, behaviors, and practices, which differentiate them as subsets within the broader cultural landscape (Course Hero, 2022). Culture encompasses a wide array of human elements, including traditions, customs, and values, all of which collectively shape the way individuals interact with one another and perceive the world around them (Course Hero, 2022). Consequently, within the overarching societal context, a spectrum of cultural identities flourishes, ranging from the rich traditions of Native American cultures to the distinctive ethos of academic institutions or even early childhood education settings (Bochner, 2003).

Transitioning from a military culture to a civilian environment is a formidable undertaking, fraught with a myriad of challenges and adjustments (Kamal, 2021; Stull et al., 2020; The Heinz Endowments, 2017). This transition frequently triggers a sense of confusion regarding one's role in a society that lacks the structured framework of the military environment (Stevenson, 2020). Significantly, misconceptions about Veterans' identities beyond their military roles, uncertainties surrounding their societal roles, and the translation of their military expertise into civilian careers all contribute to this profound sense of disorientation (Stevenson, 2020).

Interestingly, there exists a compelling parallel between the challenges encountered by Veterans reintegrating into civilian life and the difficulties experienced by individuals leaving incarceration upon their release. In this context, Santella (2020) highlights the potential utility of utilizing prisoner reintegration programs as a foundational framework for developing support systems tailored to the unique needs of Veterans. It is worth noting that the rigid protocols of military life, characterized by a warrior ethos and a reluctance to seek assistance due to the perception of weakness, diverge significantly from the more individualistic and less structured nature of civilian culture (Gettings et al., 2019; Institute of Medicine et al., 2013).

Military Culture

The military culture, which serves as the cornerstone of each branch within the United States Armed Services, nurtures a set of core values that include loyalty, integrity, teamwork, and

sacrifice (Wiegand & Paletz, 2001). These core values, instilled during basic training, shape service members' perspectives and actions (Adams, 2019; Hooper, 2021). The structured routines, unwavering discipline, and profound sense of camaraderie that characterize military life stand in stark contrast to the comparatively unstructured and individualistic nature of civilian existence. The military culture places a strong emphasis on discipline, strict adherence to rules, and a hierarchical command structure, all of which diverge significantly from the emphasis on autonomy and individuality prized in civilian society.

Within the military culture, every facet of life is meticulously regulated, from personal appearance to daily routines, reflecting a level of control that is often absent in civilian life (Hooper, 2021). Furthermore, the military's hierarchical chain of command assumes a pivotal role in ensuring mission success and member safety, a far departure from the decision-making structures prevalent in civilian contexts (C. Castro, 2017; Schlossberg, 2011). These marked differences between military and civilian cultures contribute substantially to the challenges that Veterans encounter when transitioning into a society operating on fundamentally distinct principles.

Civilian Culture

Civilian culture, distinct from the military, is characterized by its emphasis on individualism and diverse values (Vocabulary.com, 2022). While the civilian workforce offers greater flexibility and autonomy, it may lack the strong work ethic and collective identity seen in the military (Military.com, 2017). The difference between military and civilian cultures may, in part, stem from communities' unpreparedness to accommodate transitioning Veterans, emphasizing the importance of society's acceptance and understanding (Santella, 2020; Wagner, 2019). As Veterans navigate the intricate interplay between these cultures, addressing misconceptions, stigmas, and stereotypes becomes a pivotal step in facilitating their successful reintegration into civilian life (Santella, 2020).

Issues Uncovered

Misconceptions, Stigmas, and Stereotypes

Misconceptions, as defined, refer to erroneous beliefs (Bensley & Lilienfeld, 2015). Stigmas, on the other hand, pertain to the negative perception of individuals or groups, viewing them as deviating from accepted norms or exhibiting behavior deemed abnormal or unacceptable within a given cultural context, which can lead to disgrace (Acosta et al., 2014; Stone & Stone, 2015). Stereotypes, as described by the American Psychological Association (2022), encompass exaggerated and persistent negative judgments about individuals or social groups that prove resistant to change.

Within society, it is important to recognize that not all Veterans are perceived as dangerous, nor do all Veterans believe that civilians fail to comprehend their experiences (Adams, 2019; C. Castro, 2017; Morin, 2011). However, it is essential to acknowledge that misconceptions portraying all Veterans as dangerous or mentally ill are perpetuated, partly due to media portrayals (Adams, 2019; Burns, 2020; Institute of Medicine et al., 2013; Stone & Stone, 2015; The Heinz Endowments, 2017).

The apprehension of being viewed as weak deters many Veterans from seeking assistance, and this fear is compounded by the social stigma surrounding mental health (Gettings et al., 2019; Institute of Medicine et al., 2013). Concerns about increased isolation also act as a barrier to utilizing support services (Institute of Medicine et al., 2013; Mack-Harris, 2019). Furthermore, doubts arise regarding the effectiveness and potential side effects of medication, coupled with the complexities of navigating the Veterans Affairs system (Adams, 2019; Gettings et al., 2019). Despite military public relations efforts promoting mental health services, concerns persist about potential repercussions from commanders and peers, impacting military careers (Institute of Medicine et al., 2013).

The most substantial obstacle confronting Veterans during their transition to civilian life lies in contending with damaging stereotypes that contribute to discrimination (Adams, 2019; Santella, 2020; Vogt et al., 2020). Achieving a deeper public understanding of the experiences of service members proves indispensable for their successful reintegration (SAMHSA, 2021; Santella, 2020). It is essential to recognize that post-9/11 conflicts differ significantly from earlier conflicts such

as Vietnam, particularly in terms of deployment rotations and durations (DePu, 2006; Santella, 2020; Sayer et al., 2010). For instance, while Vietnam tours typically lasted a year, more recent operations during the War on Terror witnessed multiple deployments of varying lengths across different military branches (Nardulli, 2003; Neumann et al., 2005). The increased involvement of the Army National Guard in these rotations marks a shift in deployment strategy (Institute of Medicine et al., 2013; Nardulli, 2003; Neumann et al., 2005; SAMHSA, 2021). Such changes, characterized by prolonged and frequent deployments, lead to heightened stress and psychological trauma, thereby affecting the smooth transition to civilian life (Bonanno et al., 2012; Interian et al., 2014; Milstein et al., 2021; Moore et al., 2017; Sayer et al., 2010; Street et al., 2009).

It is imperative to acknowledge that these negative perceptions and accompanying stigmas exert a significant influence on a Veteran's prospects for stable employment.

Translating Military Skills: A Double-Edged Sword

Effectively applying military skills to civilian roles constitutes a pivotal aspect of successful Veterans' integration into the civilian workforce (Hooper, 2021; VA.gov, 2015b). This transition also entails a shift from mission-driven work cultures to shift-driven ones, exerting significant impacts on employment opportunities and mental well-being (Hooper, 2021; Wagner, 2019).

It is noteworthy that Veterans accumulate valuable leadership and problem-solving skills throughout their military service, often collectively referred to as "cultural capital" (Adams, 2019; Burns, 2020; VA.gov, 2015a). These competencies can prove advantageous in civilian workplaces, contributing to their effectiveness and adaptability (Cooper et al., 2018). Nevertheless, one of the foremost challenges confronting Veterans is the task of translating and demonstrating the relevance of these skills to civilian employers (Adams, 2019; C. Castro, 2017).

Cultural Capital and its Value

The training and experiences gained in the military can serve as an asset (Adams, 2019). For example, skills like working well under pressure, perseverance, and self-control are highly desired by employers (Burns, 2020). However, if these skills are not properly translated, employers might

undervalue the Veteran's potential, diminishing the societal value of their 'cultural capital' (Adams, 2019; Bascetta, 2002; Cooper et al., 2018; Martensen, 2021).

Veterans often face difficulties in explaining their military achievements in a way that resonates with hiring managers (Adams, 2019; iCIMS Inc., 2017; Martensen, 2021). If hiring managers do not understand the depth and relevance of the skills Veterans bring, these candidates may be overlooked. Some research suggests that hiring managers may even devalue the military experience, complicating the job search for Veterans further.

Rapid Cultural Transitions

Veterans who have only served the minimum enlistment may find it harder to adjust back to civilian life compared to those retiring after long service periods (Cooper et al., 2018). This rapid shift between cultures can exacerbate employment challenges and may also contribute to mental health issues.

Recommendations

To bridge the gap between military and civilian work cultures, it is important to incorporate specialized job training into Transition Assistance Programs (Burns, 2020). This can help Veterans articulate their skills in a manner that is immediately understood and valued by civilian employers.

By understanding these challenges and actively working to address them, both Veterans and employers can benefit from the rich skill set that military service cultivates.

Employment Challenges

Unemployment, defined as the condition of individuals actively seeking work but unable to secure employment, is a significant concern (BLS, 2021; Hayes, 2022). On the other hand, underemployment arises when an individual's job does not align with their skillset, leading to situations like a medical graduate working in a parking garage (Chen, 2021). For Veterans transitioning to civilian life, achieving secure and well-compensated employment is of paramount importance, aligning with the foundational principles of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Adams, 2019; Gepp, 2022; Martensen, 2021; NIDA, 2019; Wahome, 2022).

Recent assessments of the Transition Assistance Program have yielded valuable insights into the employment challenges faced by Veterans upon separation from the military. Notably, the Department of Labor Employment Workshop and Career Technical Training Track emerged as critical factors influencing job satisfaction among Veterans (OTED, 2022). The report also brought to light specific areas of concern, such as the difficulty in translating military experience into civilian job requirements and the struggle to maintain a work-life balance. These findings underscore the need for more targeted support aimed at helping Veterans effectively convey their skills to prospective civilian employers.

Alarming, a significant portion of military members, approximately 75%, do not have post-service employment arrangements in place (Alonso et al., 2021). Conversely, those who do have either secured jobs or college plans tend to experience smoother transitions (Blue Star Families, 2019). The failure to obtain gainful employment post-service can have severe repercussions, including mental health challenges such as depression, substance abuse issues, and strained familial relationships (Martensen, 2021; NIDA, 2019).

Employer Bias and Veteran Poverty.

Persistent employer biases, despite strong job performance among Veterans, contribute to Veteran unemployment or underemployment (Adams, 2019; Alonso et al., 2021; Martensen, 2021; Sayer et al., 2010; Wagner, 2019). While data indicates that, overall, Veterans are less likely to live below the poverty line compared to non-Veterans, specific subgroups, such as younger Veterans and those from the Gulf War era, remain vulnerable (VA.gov, 2015a).

Veterans, despite their generally improved poverty rates, confront unemployment challenges (BLS, 2022). The annual unemployment rate for Veterans consistently surpasses the national average, particularly among those transitioning from active duty. The transition from military to civilian life poses increased difficulties for post-9/11 Veterans, primarily due to the complexities of translating military skills into civilian equivalents (Burns, 2020; C. Castro, 2017; Cooper et al., 2018).

Cultural adjustment challenges stemming from their period of service can influence job prospects and mental health among Veterans (Cooper et al., 2018). Veterans may also harbor unrealistic job expectations based on their military skills (Hooper, 2021).

The Importance of Pre-Planning.

Securing employment or gaining admission to college before military service concludes greatly facilitates Veterans' transition to civilian life (Blue Star Families, 2019). This pre-planned future helps imbue them with purpose, reducing the challenges associated with adjusting to civilian life (Blue Star Families, 2019). Remarkably, over two-thirds of job opportunities are secured through networking (Alonso et al., 2021). However, Veterans often perceive current transition programs as lacking effective guidance on cultural adjustment in the civilian workforce (Alonso et al., 2021; Hall, 2017).

Difficulty Adjusting to Civilian Life

Introduction and Factors

Veterans encounter unique obstacles when reintegrating into civilian life. Physical limitations and mental health issues, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), present substantial challenges affecting key life domains, including employment, social relationships, and housing (Leib, 2019).

A 2011 Pew Research study revealed that 27% of all Veterans, with the figure rising to 44% among post-9/11 Veterans, found civilian adjustment to be challenging. Certain groups, particularly those with ambiguous service roles or service-related injuries, face elevated risks (Adams, 2019; Morin, 2011).

Challenges in Family & Societal Reintegration

For 44% of Veterans, resuming family roles proves to be a complex task, affecting various family members, including spouses, children, and partners (Institute of Medicine, 2010; Worthen et al., 2012).

A 2019 study by Parker et al. found that half of Veterans felt underprepared for civilian life, with younger Veterans expressing feelings of competence in military tasks but inadequacy in civilian roles (Parker et al., 2019; Zogas, 2017).

Beyond family, Veterans encounter difficulties in managing finances and integrating into society. Castro (2017) emphasized these struggles, supported by a survey indicating that 47% of Veterans find societal transition challenging (Blue Star Families, 2019).

Psychological and Support Barriers

Mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, and PTSD, frequently act as obstacles to effective reintegration (Mack-Harris, 2019).

Veterans often express uncertainty about available support options, such as the Transition Assistance Program. This underscores the need for improved information distribution and strengthened support networks (Alonso et al., 2021; Leib, 2019).

Given the multifaceted nature of these challenges, immediate and tailored support becomes imperative. The following section will provide comprehensive recommendations by first examining individual challenges and then expanding to broader societal and systemic issues in the subsequent "Reintegration" section, thus offering a more profound understanding of Veterans' struggles.

Reintegration into Civilian Life

United Nations Definition and Societal Role

Reintegration, as defined by the United Nations, entails the process of readjusting to civilian status, returning to conventional conditions, and shedding military structures and mindsets (Chan et al., 2006; Saldner, 2020). The success of reintegration is not solely the responsibility of Veterans; rather, it is a collective effort involving both Veterans and society at large (Saldner, 2020).

Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR)

The Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration process, developed by the United Nations, aims to facilitate the transition of service members into civilian life. However, the reintegration component of this process often falls short due to inadequate clarification of the term "reintegration," leading to misunderstandings and disagreements regarding its meaning, thereby diminishing the overall effectiveness of the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration process (Saldner, 2020).

Complexity of Reintegration

Reintegration encompasses a multitude of challenges, including employment-seeking, societal engagement, decision-making, and addressing psychological issues. This process is intricate and protracted, necessitating concerted efforts for successful outcomes (Saldner, 2020).

The concept of social cohesion, measuring the relationships between individuals, groups, and larger entities, characterized by trust, acceptance, and a sense of belonging (Chan et al., 2006), is as critical as Veterans' own adjustments to society in determining successful reintegration (Saldner, 2020).

The application of multi-group confirmatory factor analysis (MGCFA) serves as a composite indicator (CI) for evaluating the likelihood of successful Veteran reintegration. Utilized as a research analysis tool, multi-group confirmatory factor analysis scrutinizes whether patterns or responses in survey data across various societal groups remain consistent, offering a deeper and more nuanced understanding of expectations and outcomes related to Veteran reintegration (Brown et al., 2017).

Veterans who have served in war zones often experience culture shock, a disorienting feeling due to unfamiliar surroundings and practices, upon their return to civilian life. This sense of displacement complicates their efforts to establish meaningful relationships with civilians. Additionally, conveying their war experiences to those who have not served proves particularly challenging, further complicating the reintegration process (C. Castro, 2017; Hooper, 2021). This communication barrier exacerbates the complexities of reintegration (C. Castro, 2017).

Difficulties in reintegration significantly impact Veterans' ability to secure stable employment and housing. Remarkably, one-third of separated Veterans have experienced homelessness, primarily attributed to financial constraints and mental health issues (Leib, 2019).

Mental health concerns, including substance abuse, impede Veterans' prospects of obtaining stable employment and contribute to homelessness (Leib, 2019). The transition to civilian life poses numerous challenges for Veterans, and mental and emotional health conditions are integral to these challenges. According to a recent assessment by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (2022), over half of the Veterans participating in the Transition Assistance Program reported ongoing mental or emotional health conditions. However, only 55% of these Veterans sought help, underscoring the disparity between the need for mental health services and their actual utilization (OTED, 2022).

This data aligns with earlier findings on Veterans' mental health, emphasizing the imperative need for more robust support systems. The report further highlights that Veterans encounter difficulties in transitioning their mental health appointments as they exit the Department of Defense system, a pivotal point in their care (VHA Office of Mental Health, 2022).

Enhanced understanding of the Veteran experience compared to civilians can significantly contribute to improved reintegration (Saldner, 2020). Challenges encompass not only securing employment but also building effective support networks for mental health and social stability (Leib, 2019).

Other Transition Issues

Support Network and Reverse Culture Shock

A successful transition to civilian life hinges significantly upon the presence of an effective support network. This network should fulfill specific criteria, encompassing emotional support and career guidance (Blue Star Families, 2019). While Veterans Affairs provides essential mental health services, various community organizations offer programs for social integration. Additionally, specialized Veteran service groups are dedicated to creating employment opportunities (Parker et al., 2019).

Veterans often grapple with challenges like emotional detachment, language barriers, and a deficiency in social skills, all of which can significantly hinder their capacity to establish essential support networks (Leib, 2019). According to Alonso et al. (2021), pre-existing personal and professional contacts play a pivotal role during the transition period. Early connections with career counselors also prove to be of vital importance (Alonso et al., 2021).

Financial stability is another concern, as difficulty in securing stable employment can impede a Veteran's ability to meet basic needs, including housing, and subsequently hinder social interactions (Leib, 2019). Notably, only 22% of colleges offer specialized transition programs, revealing a significant gap in educational support (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Social connections are fundamental to well-being, as noted in Maslow's hierarchy (Gepp, 2022).

Support networks are not isolated entities; Veterans and their families should be aware of the existence of resources available for assistance (Blue Star Families, 2019). Research indicates that robust support systems contribute to smoother transitions (Hooper, 2021). Veterans often feel estranged from society, making them hesitant to seek help, underscoring the necessity for a structured support network complemented by informal relationships (Blue Star Families, 2019).

The term "reverse culture shock" describes the emotional and psychological disorientation experienced by service members when transitioning back to civilian life (Cooper et al., 2018). This disorientation encompasses more than mere homesickness; it can manifest as anxiety, depression, or even anger. These emotions stem from the disparity between service members' prior understanding of normal civilian behavior and the new perspectives acquired during military service. Adaptation becomes essential to align Veterans' expectations with the realities of civilian life, encompassing aspects such as job hunting, social interactions, and even mundane daily routines (Cooper et al., 2018). A comprehensive understanding of these intricate issues is pivotal for developing an effective support system. Factors complicating reintegration include extended deployments, limited breaks between deployments, and more frequent deployments, which collectively contribute to both physical and mental stressors (Bonanno et al., 2012; Interian et al., 2014; Leib, 2019; Moore et al., 2017; Sayer et al., 2010; Street et al., 2009).

Code of Discipline and Habitus

Discipline extends beyond mere rule-following; it constitutes a structured system of guidelines with penalties for violations. In academic terms, it embodies a set of norms and rules that promote systematic conduct (Oxford University Press, 2022). In the United States military, discipline is rigorously defined and enforced, serving as a cornerstone of military life, governed by Executive Order 10631, delineating everything from appropriate attire to specific protocols for addressing superiors (Eisenhower, 1955; House of Representatives, 1949; Office of the Federal Register, 2004).

Prior to commencing military life, prospective service members are introduced to these expectations through recruitment literature and pre-enlistment briefings, setting the stage for the military's anticipated standards concerning personal appearance, communication style, and overall behavior (MarineParents.com, Inc, 2022; USMC, 2021).

Once basic training begins, recruits are immersed in an environment designed to replace preconceived civilian cultural norms with the military's stringent code of discipline. This entails not only rule adherence but also assimilation into a way of life where every action is regulated (Cooper et al., 2018). Cooper et al. (2018) draw a parallel between the military's insular culture and the distinct societies observed in places like mental asylums, as analyzed by Goffman in 1976. The military's self-contained society possesses norms and expectations that are equally specialized and unique.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of 'habitus' illustrates how military service profoundly influences the social behaviors and expectations of service members, essentially becoming second nature to them (Bourdieu, 2012; Cooper et al., 2018). The term 'hysteresis' is introduced to describe the disorientation or gap that Veterans experience when attempting to navigate civilian life using their military-trained mindset (Cooper et al., 2018). The structure and rules in military settings are explicit and rigid, offering a sense of predictability and order (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Parker et al., 2019). In contrast, civilian life often presents a less structured environment, with guidelines and social norms that can appear vague or inconsistent to Veterans (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Parker et al., 2019). This disparity can induce emotional stress and difficulties in everyday situations for Veterans (Cooper et al., 2018).

James McDermott (2007) explains that Veterans can successfully transition from the military to civilian life if they proactively prepare well in advance of the transition (Cooper et al., 2018). Veterans who have actively participated in their personal development planning throughout their military career can maintain familiarity with civilian life while enhancing themselves (Cooper et al., 2018).

Upon entering civilian life, Veterans must adapt to a self-directed lifestyle, distinct from the collective accountability found in military units (Bonanno et al., 2012). This shift necessitates the acquisition of new social skills, including learning how to engage with individuals who may hold different attitudes toward authority, a daunting prospect. Therefore, it is crucial for Veterans to establish realistic expectations and adapt to the social dynamics of their new environment.

Unrealistic Expectations, Homelessness, Substance Abuse

In a comprehensive study, Burns (2020) identified that when Veterans and their families maintain the expectation of returning to pre-deployment life, it can lead to heightened family conflicts and elevated levels of depression. These expectations not only exacerbate the overall mental health of the Veteran but also significantly increase the risk of suicide. Burns conducted a comprehensive study identifying 24 key personal strengths, such as creativity, bravery, and kindness, which play a pivotal role in this context. Therapists and reintegration programs can utilize this information to fine-tune their techniques, ensuring a smoother and more successful transition. Among the numerous factors influencing this transition, resilience emerges as particularly crucial for enabling Veterans to navigate the complexities of reintegration (Burns, 2020).

According to Gettings et al. (2019), for the families of Veterans, acceptance and emotional connection with their returned loved ones become primary concerns. Veterans who have undergone multiple deployments exhibit compounded trauma levels, negatively affecting their ability to reintegrate smoothly into civilian life. Reservists and National Guard Veterans often lack the formal military support structures enjoyed by active-duty service members, rendering family support even more pivotal for this subgroup. More than half of returning Veterans report difficulty in the reintegration process, with a troubling one-fourth of that population describing their struggle as moderate to severe (Gettings et al., 2019).

Feelings of disconnection and alienation from civilian society can become exacerbated, deepening a Veteran's sense of isolation. This, in turn, hampers their capacity to accept emotional support from friends and family members, intensifying feelings of isolation. Such resistance to receiving support is frequently rooted in deeper issues of trust and an ingrained fear of manipulation or exploitation (Gettings et al., 2019).

According to Vogt et al (2020), in life after service, officers exhibit more positive indicators for health, social interaction, and employment opportunities than their enlisted counterparts, especially within the critical first year following discharge. Recent research conducted within the first 90 days of transition indicates that enlisted service members encounter a greater range of adjustment issues, from emotional to occupational. Consequently, Vogt et al. propose that support strategies should encompass a broader focus, moving beyond just chronic issues to adopt a more comprehensive approach for enhancing the well-being of all Veterans (Vogt et al., 2020).

Due to the prolonged military engagements following 9/11, redeployments have become increasingly frequent, amplifying stress levels for Veterans and, by extension, their families. Considering this, acquiring a nuanced understanding of the risks and challenges involved in the transition phase is of paramount importance for achieving successful reintegration (Burns, 2020).

Based on the findings of Burns (2020), statistical data from the year 2018 indicate that military personnel accounted for an alarming 15% of suicides. Among younger Veterans, particularly those from the post-9/11 cohort, suicide rates are alarmingly high. As they reintegrate, Veterans confront a range of formidable challenges, from the complexity of readjusting to family dynamics to grappling with issues like substance abuse and the possibility of homelessness (Burns, 2020). The tactical approaches that Veterans employ to transition back into civilian life are determined by a variety of factors, including their socioeconomic conditions and their own background experiences (Cooper et al., 2018).

Estimates suggest that from 40,000 to over 67,000 Veterans are homeless and living on the streets (Moduet, n.d.; Stasha, 2020). These numbers are derived from those who seek help from Veterans Affairs and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (Institute of Medicine et al., 2013). Homeless Veterans who do not receive care or assistance are not accounted for. One study even

lists as much as one-third of Veterans who separated from the military as being homeless, attributing this to unemployment, mental health conditions, and substance abuse (Leib, 2019).

Understanding the challenges that Veterans face is essential for facilitating their return to civilian life (Burns, 2020). Having a job and enrolling in college can provide a sense of purpose (Blue Star Families, 2019). However, the difficulties associated with transitioning from military to civilian life can lead to employment problems, mental health issues, and homelessness, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive support to ensure no Veteran is left behind (Burns, 2020; C. Castro, 2017; Cooper et al., 2018; Elnitsky et al., 2017).

Homeless Veterans have higher rates of substance (alcohol and drug) abuse, poor health, mental illness, and suicide (Adams, 2019; Burns, 2020). While many Veterans successfully adapt to civilian life, a significant number struggle, particularly with employment, housing, and mental health issues such as depression and substance abuse (Cooper et al., 2018). Veterans facing moderate to severe challenges often fail to meet basic needs, as outlined by Maslow, such as self-care, societal involvement, productivity, and emotional regulation (Gepp, 2022; Gettings et al., 2019; Martensen, 2021; Wahome, 2022).

Removing the threat of a dishonorable discharge for substance abuse opens the door for Veterans to self-medicate with drugs or alcohol to manage the stress and anxiety associated with their transition (Cooper et al., 2018; Gettings et al., 2019; Martensen, 2021; NIDA, 2019). Mental health issues like substance use directly influence employability (Leib, 2019). Alcohol abuse is more prevalent among military members than in the civilian population (Burns, 2020). Used excessively as a coping mechanism for stress and pain, this pattern of abuse can persist even after transitioning to civilian life, affecting the overall quality of life for Veterans (Burns, 2020).

Quality of Life and Transition Stress

The quality of life is a multifaceted issue for Veterans transitioning back to civilian life. Common challenges encompass employment instability, anxiety, and depression, all of which can collectively erode the quality of life (Adams, 2019; Alonso et al., 2021; Elnitsky et al., 2017; Gettings et al., 2019). A health screening before separation from the military could address the possibility of health issues early on (Vogt et al., 2020).

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention defines well-being as a person who feels life satisfaction (CDC, 2018). Since feelings of well-being are subjective, self-reporting is the only way to measure. Research by Ortiz-Ospina and Roser (2013) reveals that on a scale of 1 to 10, the United States rates their happiness and life satisfaction at 6.88 during 2018, which is down 0.30 points (or 4%) from 2005. Conversely, Boston University School of Medicine (2017) states that post 9/11 Veterans report doing well after re-entering civilian life.

Life satisfaction among Veterans correlates with the sense of control they experience during their transition (Robertson & Brott, 2014). Supportive environments contribute to a more successful transition, boosting emotional well-being and facilitating social integration, aligning with Maslow's hierarchy of basic needs (Alonso et al., 2021; Milstein et al., 2021). However, social isolation can become an issue when Veterans do not feel integrated into their communities (Milstein et al., 2021; Wahome, 2022). Studies and survey results indicate that existing Transition Assistance Programs may fall short in adequately preparing Veterans for the civilian job market (Hall, 2017; Robertson & Brott, 2013).

Schlossberg's Transition Theory theorizes that an individual's perception of a transition significantly influences its success or failure. Schlossberg identifies four key factors known as the 4Ss: situation, self, social support, and strategies (Evans et al., 1998; Schlossberg, 2011).

The 'situation' factor considers the impact of concurrent stressors on an individual's ability to manage transitions (Adams, 2019). 'Self' refers to one's capacity to adapt to change (Adams, 2019; Schlossberg, 2011). Adequate 'social support' can alleviate the stress associated with a transition. Finally, 'strategies' for coping, like reframing a situation positively, affect transition management (Adams, 2019; Schlossberg, 2011).

For Veterans, transition stress is a critical aspect of successful reintegration (Adams, 2019; Elnitsky et al., 2017; Santella, 2020). The stress of moving from military to civilian life can lead to a cascade of challenges, such as depression and suicide risk (Adams, 2019; Alonso et al., 2021; Burns, 2020; Hooper, 2021; Milstein et al., 2021; Santella, 2020).

As highlighted by Alonso et al. (2021), the change from a military to a civilian professional identity also complicates Veterans' role within society. Networking among transitioning Veterans eases this change (Alonso et al., 2021).

Social anxiety poses a unique challenge to Veterans during the reintegration process. The condition can intensify stress, often leading individuals to further withdraw from social interactions (Adams, 2019; Elnitsky et al., 2017; Santella, 2020). This can be particularly problematic, as strong social networks are generally recommended to ease transition stress. For those with social anxiety, traditional methods of social support may not be viable options, necessitating alternative coping strategies or professional intervention to ensure a more successful reintegration.

Schlossberg emphasizes that adaptive skills and social connections play a pivotal role in how an individual adjusts to change (Adams, 2019; Goodman et al., 2006; Hall, 2017; Schlossberg, 2011). Social interactions can also be facilitated through creative means like card games that encourage open dialogue (Milstein et al., 2021).

Challenges are exacerbated due to the frequent redeployments seen in post-9/11 wars (Burns, 2020). Some Veterans may face delays in receiving mental health services, sometimes taking up to seven months or being told that they do not “rate” receiving care, complicating their understanding of the support available to them (C. Beekman, March 17, 2022, personal conversation).

Reviewed Literature

Methodology of Reviewed Literature

Martensen (2021) conducted a comprehensive thematic analysis employing Dedoose software to discern prevalent patterns and illuminate specific details in order to gain a profound understanding of interviewees' experiences. Dedoose software is a versatile tool for analyzing various data types in mixed methods and qualitative research (Dedoose Editors, 2022).

Martensen's (2021) research centered on the transition experiences of ten Veterans identified through Facebook, employing a survey featuring open-ended questions. The primary aim was to elucidate both external and internal factors contributing to successful transitions into civilian roles. An important revelation from Martensen's study was the imperative need to bridge employment gaps that exist between military and civilian employment opportunities (Martensen, 2021).

In a study by Adams (2019), data were gathered from ten Veterans through telephone interviews, which were subsequently audio recorded and manually transcribed. Adams (2019) employed the critical incident reporting technique, a method for observing and collecting information about an individual's behavior in specific situations (Bott & Tourish, 2016; Flanagan, 1954). Additionally, Adams (2019) incorporated member checking, a process in which research participants were provided with research findings to verify their accuracy (Birt et al., 2016). It is pertinent to note that Adams' research protocol received approval from the Northcentral University Institutional Review Board (Adams, 2019).

Santella (2020) conducted interviews with 26 Veterans who transitioned out of the military after January 1, 2002, and gained admission to two specific academic institutions. Using binary logistic regression, Santella examined whether participants successfully completed their Individual Development Plan/Individual Transition Plan (IDP/ITP) and successfully transitioned to an academic institution (Santella, 2020)

Hall (2017) employed the Person-Environment (PE) Fit theory as the foundation for their qualitative study. This theory posits that greater compatibility between an individual and their environment leads to more positive outcomes (Gander et al., 2020). This concept is reinforced by employers seeking employees who align well with their workplace culture, fostering harmonious relationships and professional growth.

Limitations of Reviewed Literature

Martensen's (2021) study primarily focused on Veterans who successfully secured employment without contrasting or comparing their experiences with those who took similar steps but did not achieve employment success.

Adams (2019) referred to Veteran status as being obtained after 90 days of active duty, without citing the specific source of this information. It is noteworthy that other sources indicate that service members typically need to serve at least 180 days on active duty, except in cases where service-related injuries lead to an honorable discharge (Athey, 2019; Bledsoe, 2022; CNIC, 2021; Edwards, 2015; Hall, 2017; Hart, 2018; Kamarck, 2018; Martensen, 2021; Thornberry, 2018;

United States House of Representatives, 2019; USMC, 2019; Vogt et al., 2020). Additionally, Adams (2019) limited their study to underemployed Veterans.

Sayer et al. (2010) relied on self-reporting for post-traumatic stress syndrome diagnosis, which may have influenced the number of Veterans identified as potentially suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome. Furthermore, their study did not encompass Veterans receiving care from civilian medical professionals, making it unclear whether the issues outlined in the study are universal or pertain specifically to Veterans receiving care from the Veterans Administration. Additionally, Sayer et al. acknowledged uncertainty regarding whether post-traumatic stress syndrome in Veterans resulted from military experiences or other non-military-related factors (Sayer et al., 2010).

Alonso et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of networking for Veterans transitioning to civilian life but did not provide guidance for less socially inclined Veterans who may suffer from social anxiety and lack a supportive family network.

Baruch and Quick's (2007) study concentrated on Navy Admirals, leaving out the perspectives of individuals from other ranks.

Robertson and Brott (2013) centered their research on male Veterans transitioning to teaching positions within the civilian workforce, potentially limiting the applicability of their findings to a broader population.

Kamal (2021) explored the impact of career-based workshops on Veteran success during their transition to civilian life but did not utilize Hart's validated instrument for their research despite being used as a reference.

Morris (2019) examined the experiences of Navy and Marine Corps Veterans transitioning to the civilian workforce in San Diego, California, focusing on personal, mental health, societal, and organizational barriers and support. The study referred to Hart (2018) as a reference but did not employ Hart's validated instrument.

Pride (2019) studied the experiences of female Veterans transitioning to the civilian workforce, referencing Hart's work regarding the importance of a support network but not using Hart's validated instrument.

Bergado (2022) investigated the impact of peer support networks on Filipino-American Veterans transitioning from the U.S. military to civilian life and how this support differed between active duty and civilian life. Bergado noted that Veterans in their study felt that the Department of Defense's Transition Assistance Program had room for improvement but did not utilize Hart's instrument.

Alonso et al. (2021) cited both Hall (2017) and Hart (2018) but did not use either instrument in their research.

Sylvester (2018) explored factors contributing to the success of Veterans re-entering civilian life using open-ended questions. The study acknowledged that attending the Transition Assistance Program, networking, earning a degree before transitioning, and planning ahead were cited by study participants as contributing to their successful reintegration. However, Sylvester (2018) cited Hall's work without using Hall's instrument.

De La Torre (2018) researched entrepreneurship among Hispanic Veterans and its impact on their successful transition to civilian life, citing Hall's work and utilizing their own instrument.

It is important to note that no evidence suggests that other researchers utilized Hall's validated instrument to conduct their studies. Hall's work appears to have been primarily cited as a reference source for its content.

Recommendations of Reviewed Literature

Martensen (2021) recommended that service members preparing to exit the military should develop a comprehensive plan for their post-service endeavors, with a particular focus on self-prioritization based on their unique experiences.

Adams (2019) recommended further investigation into the reasons behind gaps in research related to underemployment among Veterans, with the aim of utilizing this data to facilitate smoother transitions into civilian life. Adams (2019) also proposed the consideration of hiring Veterans who have undergone leadership training as part of their military service, emphasizing that this would align with corporate and social responsibility objectives, benefiting both the company and the Veteran. The study suggested that the Transition Assistance Program allocate at least one day of

training specifically for transitioning to civilian employment, with the added support of relieving service members of prior duty obligations during the final 90 days of service. Adams (2019) further advised reaching out to local human resource companies, hiring managers, and recruiters to highlight the similarities between military and civilian cultures, thus assisting Veterans in their transition process.

Sayer et al. (2010) recommended a more proactive approach in targeting Veterans who may have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) for reintegration interventions.

Santella (2020) pointed out the absence of external evaluations to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the Transition Assistance Program. The study suggested applying program theory evaluation to determine the program's success and advocated for periodic evaluations of Veterans' opinions on the program's effectiveness to facilitate continuous improvement.

These recommendations provide valuable insights into areas of improvement and future research directions in the field of Veterans' transition to civilian life.

Conclusion

The Transition Assistance Program is an essential element in the support structure for Veterans as they transition from military service to civilian life. However, despite its significance, there exists a notable absence of review processes designed to assess the program's effectiveness and efficiency, leaving taxpayers and stakeholders uninformed about its true impact (Milstein et al., 2021; Santella, 2020). Furthermore, there is a distinct lack of research addressing the fundamental question of whether Veterans perceive the Transition Assistance Program as adequately meeting their specific needs and expectations.

Martensen (2021) delved into the Veterans' ability to secure meaningful employment after their military service. Adams (2019) conducted research focused on the employment aspect, with a particular emphasis on whether the obtained employment provided commensurate authority, responsibilities, and compensation as compared to their roles during active duty. Milstein et al. (2021) explored the role of self-guided dialogue in assisting Veterans in becoming more at ease discussing their military experiences. Santella (2020) scrutinized whether the Department of Defense's Transition Assistance Program aligned with the organization's stated objectives,

specifically with regards to facilitating Veterans' successful transition into accredited academic institutions.

Studies conducted by Veterans Affairs and Boston University underscore the critical importance of providing assistance to Veterans, particularly during the decades following their departure from the military (B.U. School of Medicine, 2017; Institute of Medicine et al., 2013; VA.gov, 2016). It is evident that health, well-being, and community involvement tend to decrease in the initial three years after military service (B.U. School of Medicine, 2017; Vogt et al., 2022). Furthermore, the odds of Veterans experiencing homelessness significantly increase between 10 and 15 years after their return to civilian life compared to the first five years (Tsai et al., 2020). This phenomenon, known as a "sleeping effect," entails a delayed intensification of the issue's impact, rather than an immediate one (Baumeister & Vohs, 2022; Tsai et al., 2020). The delayed need for assistance underscores the crucial significance of proactive planning and addressing current needs to prevent issues from compounding over time (IOM, 2014).

Santella (2020) draws an apt analogy between the challenges faced by Veterans during their transition to civilian life and those encountered by prisoners reintegrating into society. The similarities in difficulties suggest that programs designed to support prisoner reintegration could serve as a foundational model for developing initiatives aimed at assisting Veterans.

Wagner (2019) emphasizes the importance of customized support for Veterans, especially those who may not seek civilian employment directly aligned with their Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). The ability to link military training to civilian job skills is a valuable asset, and Wagner (2019) explores how Veterans in California perceive the effectiveness of the Transition Assistance Program in this regard.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) acknowledge the improvements made to the Transition Assistance Program over the past decade as beneficial (Morosky, 2015). In 2014, the VFW's Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) program conducted surveys involving over 1,400 Veterans to gather their feedback on the Transition Assistance Program (Morosky, 2015). While the results indicated satisfaction with course redesign, some limitations were noted, particularly in the voluntary transition tracks such as application assistance, job search support, school research, college application completion, and business start-up guidance (Airman & Family

Readiness Center, 2013; Morosky, 2015). It is crucial to consider that VFW members are typically aged 35 and older, with longer-than-average military service, which may not fully represent the perspectives of younger Veterans (Morosky, 2015). Therefore, it is imperative to undertake steps to evaluate program efficiency and Veteran perceptions after they have successfully returned to civilian life, especially after a Veterans Affairs rating decision, to enable continuous improvements that yield the greatest benefit to Veterans.

Considering the aforementioned gaps in research and the critical need for comprehensive assessment, there is a pressing need to conduct an outcome mapping to thoroughly evaluate the efficacy of the Transition Assistance Program (Research to Action, 2012). Numerous studies have highlighted the necessity for robust follow-up mechanisms to assess the treatment and support provided to Veterans, ensuring that their needs are met in the most effective manner possible.

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology of a comprehensive mixed-method study aimed at evaluating the experiences and perceptions of Veterans who have transitioned out of military service post-September 11, 2001. The primary objective of this research was to assess the extent to which the Transition Assistance Program had effectively met the needs and expectations of these Veterans during their transition to civilian life. To achieve a thorough and nuanced understanding of this complex phenomenon, a combination of qualitative and quantitative data was collected and rigorously analyzed. The study draws upon validated instruments derived from two seminal dissertations: 'Transitioning Enlisted Military Veterans Seeking Civilian Employment' by Frank Hart (2018) and 'Veterans Stories: A Narrative Inquiry Research Study Examination of Veterans Navigating Second Careers' by Alvin F. Hall (2017). Participants for this study were accessed through various Veterans resource centers at reputable universities, including Purdue University, University of Nebraska Lincoln, University of Nebraska Omaha, and University of Kentucky. Additionally, personal networks were tapped into to ensure a diverse and representative sample. The sampling strategy aimed to replicate the 2022 Veterans Administration's service branch ratio, ensuring a statistically valid and representative analysis (Office of Policy and Planning, 2010).

Study Methodology

The methodology of this study served as the bedrock upon which research objectives were realized. It meticulously outlined the approach and methods chosen for data collection and analysis. This section provides insight into the rationale behind adopting a mixed-methods approach and expounds on the specific design types employed to ensure comprehensive findings.

Mixed Method Approach

The core aim of this dissertation was to develop a comprehensive understanding of Veterans' perceptions regarding the Transition Assistance Program. To achieve this objective, a mixed-methods approach was selected. This method enhances research validity by integrating both

qualitative and quantitative data sources (Creswell, 2015). Qualitative components encompass open-ended surveys designed to capture subjective experiences, while quantitative elements involved statistical surveys providing measurable data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). This integrated approach constitutes a 'triangulated' methodology, where the strengths of one method complement the limitations of the other, resulting in a nuanced and holistic perspective on Veterans' experiences.

Design Types Used

This section provides in-depth insights into the specific design types utilized in this research, encompassing Concurrent Triangulation and Exploratory elements. Understanding these design types is imperative for comprehending how data collection and analysis are meticulously conducted to yield well-rounded insights into Veterans' experiences with the Transition Assistance Program.

Concurrent Triangulation

Concurrent Triangulation occupies a pivotal role in this research methodology, enhancing the comprehensiveness and reliability of the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This design entails the simultaneous collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data, strengthening research robustness through cross-verification and validation of findings. Qualitative insights are derived from open-ended surveys, while quantitative metrics are obtained through validated statistical instruments. The term 'triangulation' underscores the synergistic relationship between these approaches, where each method complements and corroborates the other, mitigating individual methodological limitations (Creswell, 2012).

Exploratory Elements

The incorporation of exploratory elements serves several vital purposes. Firstly, it enhances Complementarity by addressing inherent limitations within singular qualitative or quantitative methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Secondly, it promotes Triangulation, elevating research credibility through the utilization of multiple data sources (Fetters et al., 2013). Lastly, these

exploratory elements have the potential to unveil unforeseen insights, enriching the analytical depth and contributing to a more comprehensive understanding.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this mixed-methods research dissertation is Qualitative Narrative Inquiry, as proposed by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) and O'Toole (2018). This approach is ideally suited for exploring the intricacies of Veterans' transitions to civilian employment. Qualitative Narrative Inquiry places significant emphasis on personal narratives and experiences as primary units of analysis, enabling an in-depth exploration of how individual responsibility, family involvement, and networking shape the journey from military service to civilian life.

Narrative Inquiry empowers researchers to delve deeply into Veterans' subjective experiences, capturing the complexities, challenges, and strategies inherent in their career transitions (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Through open-ended questions in surveys, participants are encouraged to share their life stories, enriching the data with diverse perspectives, and lived experiences.

By framing the study within this theoretical framework, the focus shifts towards comprehending the unique pathways and challenges that Veterans encounter during their transitions, as opposed to seeking a generalized explanation (Kim, 2023). This approach acknowledges the multifaceted nature of transition experiences and respects the individuality of each Veteran's journey. Consequently, the findings from this mixed-methods research have the potential to make a substantive contribution to the existing body of literature on Veterans' career transitions, offering valuable insights for both policy and practice.

The recruitment of participants involved leveraging various platforms such as Facebook, Veterans Affairs, LinkedIn, and military family websites. Survey questions were thoughtfully adapted from previously validated surveys.

In this mixed-methods research dissertation, the integration of qualitative and quantitative data played a central role in the research design. This integration occurred through concurrent data collection and analysis, providing a comprehensive view of Veterans' experiences (F. G. Castro et al., 2010). The mixed methods approach not only enhanced research validity but also enabled the

exploration of complex phenomena by aligning numerical outcomes with rich contextual insights. Furthermore, it supported theory development by bridging the gap between qualitative narratives and quantitative data, resulting in more robust theoretical constructs.

Reasoning for the Design

The selection of a mixed methods research design for this study is underpinned by several compelling justifications, aligning with established research methodologies and best practices. The adoption of a mixed methods approach involved the integration of both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods, thereby facilitating a comprehensive and multifaceted exploration of the research problem.

Complementarity

The utilization of a mixed methods approach leveraged the inherent strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Quantitative data provided statistical significance and allowed for generalizability of findings, while qualitative data enriched the study by offering contextual depth and a nuanced understanding of meaning. This harmonious integration ensured that the research findings were not only statistically robust but also firmly grounded in the real-world experiences of the study participants.

Triangulation

The incorporation of multiple data sources, a defining characteristic of mixed methods research, substantially enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the study (Fetters et al., 2013). By cross-verifying findings derived from both quantitative and qualitative data, this research methodology effectively mitigated the potential for bias and bolstered the validity of the conclusions drawn.

Addressing Research Questions

Certain research inquiries inherently necessitate a mixed methods approach to comprehensively address the complexity of the phenomenon under investigation (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009). For instance, to fully grasp how well the Transition Assistance Program meets Veterans' needs and

expectations, a mixed methods approach is beneficial. Such a design allows for a nuanced understanding by combining numerical data on program outcomes with qualitative insights into Veterans' experiences. This approach is tailored to address complex research questions effectively.

Contextualization

Acknowledging the paramount importance of situating the researched phenomenon within its social and cultural context, the mixed methods design empowers researchers to undertake a holistic exploration (Greene et al., 1989). Complex and multifaceted phenomena often demand qualitative insights to unearth subtleties and nuances that quantitative data alone cannot capture.

Practical Considerations

From a practical standpoint, the mixed methods design offers flexibility in data collection, making provisions for addressing constraints such as time and resources (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009). This adaptability allows for a more comprehensive data collection process, accommodating complexities that might be insurmountable through the application of a single research approach.

The decision to employ a mixed methods design was guided by the alignment of these rationales with the specific research question, the characteristics of the study population, and the available resources.

This section outlines the rationale behind selecting a mixed methods design, highlighting how it harmoniously aligned with the research objectives and the multifaceted nature of the research topic.

Research Questions

Considering the multifaceted challenges facing transitioning Veterans, this research endeavors to address a critical gap by examining the extent of support perceived by these individuals during their transition into civilian life. The primary research inquiries guiding this investigation are as follows:

- 1) What were the Veteran's expectations for the Transition Assistance Program?

- 2) Were the Veteran's expectations for the content of the Transition Assistance Program courses met?
- 3) What, if any, expectations were not met?
- 4) Do Veterans feel they were given the tools needed to successfully return to civilian life?
- 5) What parts of the course did Veterans find most helpful?
- 6) Do Veterans have any suggestions for improving the Transition Assistance Program?

To provide a structured framework for inquiry, two hypotheses emanate from these core questions:

H1₀ = Transition Assistance Program does not meet Veteran needs

H1₁ = Transition Assistance Program meets Veteran needs

H2₀ = Transition Assistance Program does not meet Veteran expectations

H2₁ = Transition Assistance Program meets Veteran expectations

This mixed-method study sought to explore the effectiveness of the Transition Assistance Program in supporting post-9/11 United States Veterans as they transition back into civilian life. The utilization of a mixed-methods approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and perspectives of these Veterans concerning the Department of Defense's Transition Assistance Program.

The primary objective of this research was to gain insight into the challenges faced by military Veterans during their transition to civilian life after separating from service. The Transition Assistance Program, initially designed to facilitate Veterans' reintegration into civilian society, encompasses various aspects, including employment, financial well-being, education, and overall welfare for Veterans (CQ Researcher, 1990).

This study's scope extended to the examination of post-9/11 Veterans from four branches of the United States Armed Services: Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines. By employing a mixed-methods approach, this research aimed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data through an

online questionnaire. It is imperative to note that all personally identifiable information was treated with the utmost confidentiality. To safeguard participants' privacy, an online survey was provided ensuring the anonymity of the respondents (ECFR.gov, 2021; PU VPR, 2022). Additionally, handwritten records were not used in this project, ensuring data security and integrity.

The data collection process adhered to the ethical guidelines outlined by Purdue University's Institutional Review Board protocol (OHRP, 1979; PU VPR, 2022), emphasizing the importance of confidentiality and participant anonymity throughout the study as shown in Appendix B.

The combination of survey responses to open ended and close ended questions allowed for a comprehensive exploration of Veterans' experiences and their perceptions of the Transition Assistance Program.

Presented in this section is a systematic alignment of the research questions with the corresponding survey questions. This alignment explains the meticulous design of the study, ensuring that the survey questions directly contribute to the investigation of the research objectives. The research questions have been carefully crafted to address specific facets of the inquiry, while the survey questions have been thoughtfully designed to elicit the data necessary for comprehensive analysis.

The study embarks on an exploration of the Transition Assistance Program's efficacy in facilitating the transition of post-9/11 United States Veterans into civilian life. To achieve this a series of research questions were formulated that scrutinize various dimensions of Veterans' experiences with the program. These questions guide the investigation and are integral to the understanding of the Transition Assistance Program's impact.

The following sections provide a detailed presentation of each research question, accompanied by the corresponding survey questions, reinforcing the rigor and precision of the research design. For full survey questions, refer to Appendix I.

Research Question 1: What were the Veteran's expectations for the Transition Assistance Program?

- *Q16*: "What does the transition assistance program mean to you, and did this program prepare you for post-military employment?"

- *Q28*: "Describe your transition experience prior to separation from active duty, what did you do to prepare for civilian employment?"
- *Q29*: "Prior to separation from the military, did you do any pre-work to prepare for the transition to civilian employment such as job-seeking, resume building, researching interview tips, etc.?"
- *Q31*: "How do you feel the Department of Defense Transition Assistance program (DoD TAP) helped you prepare for finding employment after separation from active duty?"

Research Question 2: Were the Veteran's expectations for the content of the Transition Assistance Program courses met?

- *Q30*: "Describe your experience with the DoD TAP and the services provided by the various facilitators that focused on transitioning to civilian employment?"
- *Q32*: "Are there elements of the DoD TAP that you feel were ineffective, or could be improved that would have helped you find employment?"
- *Q36*: "Based on your lived experiences, was DoD TAP effective in preparing you for civilian resume preparation, interview skills, and adjustment to the civilian culture?"
- *Q38_1*: "Do you feel the Transition Assistance Program met your needs ("conditions or states that are necessary for the physical, psychological, or social well-being of an individual or group")? - The Transition Assistance Program met my needs."

Research Question 3: What expectations were not met, if any?

- *Q32*: "Are there elements of the DoD TAP that you feel were ineffective, or could be improved that would have helped you find employment?"
- *Q36*: "Based on your lived experiences, was DoD TAP effective in preparing you for civilian resume preparation, interview skills, and adjustment to the civilian culture?"

Research Question 4: Do Veterans feel they were given the tools needed to successfully return to civilian life?

- *Q16*: "What does the transition assistance program mean to you, and did this program prepare you for post-military employment?"
- *Q31*: "How do you feel the Department of Defense Transition Assistance program (DoD TAP) helped you prepare for finding employment after separation from active duty?"

Research Question 5: What parts of the course did Veterans find most beneficial?

- *Q30*: "Describe your experience with the DoD TAP and the services provided by the various facilitators that focused on transitioning to civilian employment?"
- *Q35*: "What was your experience in communicating the experience and skills gained in the military to recruiters and hiring officials in interviews?"

Research Question 6: Do Veterans propose suggestions for enhancing the Transition Assistance Program?

- *Q25*: "What could the military service have done better or more to help create a smooth post-military retirement transition to a second career?"
- *Q26*: "What insights have you gained from your career transition that might benefit others as they pursue their career transition?"
- *Q27*: "Given your stage of transition, what additional thoughts come to mind about the relationship you see between your career transition and life satisfaction?"

This section outlined the research questions guiding the study, which aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the Transition Assistance Program for post-9/11 U.S. Veterans. Six primary questions were posed, accompanied by corresponding survey questions. A mixed-methods approach is employed for comprehensive analysis. The questions focus on Veterans' expectations, experiences, and suggestions for program improvement.

Data Collection

Data Collection Strategies

The success of any research study hinges on effective data collection strategies, particularly when engaging with a diverse and potentially hard-to-reach population such as military Veterans. In this section, the comprehensive data collection strategies designed to gather information from Veterans participating in this mixed-methods study are outlined. These strategies encompass both quantitative and qualitative dimensions, providing a holistic exploration of Veterans' experiences with the Transition Assistance Program.

Quantitative Phase

To capture quantitative insights, a structured survey featuring closed-ended questions, Likert scales, and multiple-choice options were employed. This survey was meticulously crafted to address specific aspects of Veterans' encounters with the Transition Assistance Program, drawing inspiration from the work of Hall (2017). The aim was to gather quantifiable data that can offer valuable statistical insights.

Qualitative Phase

In the qualitative phase, the research delved into the narratives and deeper insights of Veterans' experiences during their transition to civilian life. Open-ended survey interview questions, inspired by Hart (2018), provided the platform for Veterans to share their stories, opinions, and perceptions in an unrestricted manner. This approach facilitated the exploration of nuanced details and qualitative nuances, enriching the study's qualitative dimension.

Recruitment and Participant Selection

To recruit participants, a comprehensive strategy was employed that leveraged personal connections. Initial outreach involved sharing the study with a select group, including friends, family, colleagues, and directors of Veteran resource centers on April 22, 2023. These contacts acted as trusted conduits, facilitating connections with other Veterans, thereby enriching the participant pool.

Diverse Outreach

In addition to personal connections, an email campaign was launched on June 1, 2023, to expand the recruitment net. The campaign targeted a diverse array of organizations, institutions, and online communities with ties to military Veterans. This outreach extended to colleges, universities, and Veteran-focused organizations, including those previously listed. These efforts were aimed at reaching a broad and representative sample of Veterans.

Survey Instruments

Data collection primarily involved structured online surveys, designed with closed-ended questions, Likert scales, and multiple-choice options. Survey questions were drawn from validated instruments, including those from Frank Hart's dissertation, *Transitioning Enlisted Military Veterans Seeking Civilian Employment* (2018), and A.F. Hall's dissertation, *Veterans Stories: A Narrative Inquiry Research Study Examination of Veterans Navigating Second Careers* (2017). These instruments were chosen for their relevance to the study's objectives and their ability to collect meaningful data on Veterans' opinions regarding the Transition Assistance Program.

Data Collection Platforms

Online searches facilitated the identification of contacts for data collection, including groups within Facebook and LinkedIn. Engagement with family members, friends, colleagues, and directors of Veteran resource centers, alongside colleges, universities, and Veteran organizations, was integral. These contacts indicated potential sharing of the survey through their respective social media channels, although the specific platforms used were not disclosed. The study's online format did not accommodate direct follow-ups, but respondents were given the option to request one-to-one interviews, which was not utilized.

Data Security and Storage

It is important to note that no compensation, reward, or payment of any kind was offered to respondents, a fact clearly explained in the study's introductory paragraph. Participant information and responses were securely stored within Purdue University's survey platform, Qualtrics, ensuring data confidentiality and compliance with data protection regulations (PU VPR, 2022).

Data Collection Timeline

The data collection phase commenced on April 22, 2023, when the study was first shared with a select group of contacts. On June 1, 2023, after receiving only three responses, the survey was extended to a broader list of colleges and businesses to enhance participation. The data collection period concluded on October 31, 2023.

University Veteran Resource Centers: Collaborative efforts with institutions such as Purdue University's Veterans Success Center and other University Veteran resource centers, including those at the University of Nebraska Lincoln (UNL), University of Nebraska Omaha (UNO), and University of Kentucky (UKY), was instrumental in expanding the recruitment net. These centers often serve as hubs for Veterans seeking support and information, making them valuable sources for participant referrals.

Reaching for Diversity: A primary goal is to recruit a sample that mirrors the service branch distribution within the Veterans Administration's statistics for 2022, which include 47% Army, 23% Navy, 12% Marines, and 19% Air Force (Office of Policy and Planning, 2010). In cases where the composition of participants deviates by more than 5% from these percentages, a second round of surveys was distributed to address this gap. This methodological approach ensures a more representative and balanced dataset.

Strategic Email Outreach: An introductory email was crafted to inform and engage potential participants, see Appendix A. This email was dispatched to a diverse array of organizations, institutions, and online communities with ties to military Veterans. Collaborative efforts were undertaken with entities like Military-Transition.org, Veterans' organizations such as Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), as well as academic institutions, including Ivy League universities and prominent state schools.

Information Dissemination: A flyer (see Appendix H) was also designed to facilitate recruitment. This informational tool was shared through various channels, including university bulletin boards, community centers, and online platforms by third parties, widening the scope of the recruitment effort.

Selection of Validated Instruments

The selection of validated instruments is a pivotal aspect of this mixed methods study, ensuring rigorous data collection aligned with the research objectives. This section outlines the validated instruments chosen for data collection and the rationale behind their selection.

Quantitative Phase Instruments

For the quantitative phase, structured surveys were employed to gather specific data related to Veterans' experiences with the Transition Assistance Program. These surveys included closed-ended questions, Likert scales, and multiple-choice options. The selection of these survey instruments was informed by the work of Frank Hart, as presented in his dissertation titled *Transitioning Enlisted Military Veterans Seeking Civilian Employment* (Hart, 2018). Hart's research focused on the effectiveness of the Transition Assistance Program and the challenges Veterans face in finding gainful employment after transitioning from the military. By utilizing Hart's validated instrument, the study aimed to collect data that directly aligns with the research goals, allowing for a comprehensive quantitative analysis.

Qualitative Phase Instruments:

In the qualitative phase, open-ended interview questions were utilized to explore the nuanced narratives and deeper insights of Veterans' experiences during their transition to civilian life. To facilitate these, a set of open-ended questions compiled by Frank Hart in his dissertation, *Transitioning Enlisted Military Veterans Seeking Civilian Employment* (Hart, 2018) were employed and are shown in Appendix E and Appendix F. These questions, drawn from two different instruments created by Baruch and Quick (2007) and Robertson and Brott (2013), enabled the collection of qualitative data that provided clarity, validity, context, and triangulation. This approach, used by Hart (2018), allowed interviewees to express their opinions freely and steer the conversation toward topics they considered most significant.

Instrument Impact

The impact of these validated instruments on the research process was substantial. Hall's (2017) compilation of open-ended questions encouraged interviewees to provide candid and detailed

responses, aligning with the study's qualitative objectives. These questions are shown in Appendix D and Appendix F. Hart's (2018) research instrument, on the other hand, focused on assessing the effectiveness of the Transition Assistance Program and the challenges Veterans encounter when seeking civilian employment. This instrument directly addresses the research goals related to Veterans' opinions about the Transition Assistance Program. Importantly, both instruments have contributed to the body of knowledge by shedding light on critical aspects of the transition process, such as the role of proactive behavior and the need for improvements in the Transition Assistance Program.

Complementary Use

These two validated instruments for quantitative and qualitative surveys complement each other effectively. By combining Hart's and Hall's instruments, the study collected a rich array of data that included both quantitative metrics and qualitative narratives. This approach allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of Veterans' perspectives on the Transition Assistance Program and provided valuable insights for program improvement.

In conclusion, the selection of validated instruments for this study was guided by their alignment with the research objectives and their proven effectiveness in capturing data relevant to Veterans' experiences with the Transition Assistance Program. The instruments were chosen to contribute to the rigor and depth of data collection, ensuring that the study provided a well-rounded analysis of the research topic.

General Ethical Guidelines and the Role of Institutional Review Board

Ethical considerations and adherence to Institutional Review Board guidelines are paramount in conducting research involving human subjects. This section delves into the ethical dimensions of the study and the role of the Institutional Review Board in safeguarding the rights and well-being of research participants.

Institutional Review Board and Human Subject Protections

The Institutional Review Board, commonly referred to as the IRB, plays a crucial role in ensuring that research involving human subjects is conducted ethically and with the utmost consideration for the participants' rights, privacy, and well-being. At Purdue University, where this research is based, engaging with human subjects in research necessitates the involvement of the Institutional Review Board. The Institutional Review Board comprises students, faculty, and staff of Purdue University and is tasked with reviewing and approving research proposals involving human subjects. Its primary purpose is to protect the rights and welfare of individuals participating in research, particularly vulnerable populations (Purdue, 2022).

Historical Context

The existence of the Institutional Review Board is rooted in historical events that exposed unethical conduct in research involving human subjects. Notable instances include the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, where mentally impaired children were subjected to unethical experiments, and the Jewish Chronic Disease Hospital case, which involved the injection of cancer cells into chronically ill patients (Babbie, 2008). These unethical studies, among others, prompted the passage of the National Research Act in 1974, leading to the establishment of the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research. This commission produced the Belmont Report in 1974, which outlined three foundational ethical principles: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (Moon, 2009). These principles guide research practices and emphasize the need to maximize the benefits of research while minimizing harm.

Institutional Review Board Application and Review

Researchers at Purdue University are required to apply to the Institutional Review Board for review when their research involves human subjects. The Institutional Review Board review process seeks comprehensive information about the study, including the identities of individuals involved in the research, potential conflicts of interest, study names, funding sources, target participants, survey instruments, data handling procedures, compensation details for participants,

and more (Purdue IRB, n.d.). The Institutional Review Board ensures that research is conducted with the highest ethical standards, safeguarding the rights and well-being of participants.

Researcher Training

To engage in research involving human subjects at Purdue University, researchers must complete training through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Program. This training equips researchers with the knowledge and understanding of ethical guidelines and best practices for human subject research (Purdue, 2022).

Data Collection Process

The data collection process is a critical phase of this mixed-methods research study. This section outlines the procedures and methodologies employed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data from study participants.

Quantitative Data Collection

The quantitative phase of this study involved structured surveys that feature closed-ended questions, Likert scales, and multiple-choice options. These surveys were carefully selected and validated through previous research (Hall, 2017; Hart, 2018). The aim was to reach a sample size of at least 10 Veterans from each branch of service. Utilizing online survey platforms such as Facebook, Veterans Affairs, LinkedIn, and Veterans' groups enabled the study to reach a broader audience of Veterans. The larger the participant pool, the deeper the understanding of Veterans' experiences with the Transition Assistance Program. A substantial sample size allows for the identification of common needs, expectations, and potential disparities between Transition Assistance Program courses and real-life experiences.

Qualitative Data Collection

In contrast, the qualitative phase of this research involved open-ended survey questions designed to capture nuanced narratives and deeper insights into Veterans' opinions and experiences regarding the Transition Assistance Program. These survey questions will complement the structured surveys, providing additional context and richness to the data (Hart, 2018).

Data Collection Instruments

To ensure the rigor, validity, and reliability of the data collection process, validated instruments from previous research have been chosen (Hall, 2017; Hart, 2018). The questions from these instruments have been curated to provide clarity, validity, context, and triangulation (Apperson, 2017; Creswell, 2006; Edwards, 2015; Hart, 2018; Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2015; IT, n.d.; Martensen, 2021; Morse, 1991; Zohrabi, 2013). Hall's research contributed open-ended questions that allow interviewees to express their thoughts and experiences in their own words, facilitating comprehensive data collection (Hall, 2017).

Online Data Collection

Data was collected through online surveys. The use of online platforms and digital tools enables efficient data gathering while respecting participants' preferences and privacy. This method also aligns with the goal of reaching a diverse group of Veterans, regardless of their geographical location.

Ethical Considerations

In line with Purdue University's Institutional Review Board guidelines (Purdue, 2022), ethical considerations are of the utmost importance throughout the data collection process. All research activities involving human subjects are conducted with meticulous attention to participants' rights and welfare. To further ensure ethical integrity, researchers have completed mandatory training through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Program as required by Purdue (2022).

In conclusion, the data collection process for this mixed-methods research study involved a thoughtful combination of quantitative and qualitative questions through a survey. By employing validated instruments and adhering to ethical guidelines, the research aimed to gather robust data that will contribute valuable insights into Veterans' experiences with the Transition Assistance Program and provide a foundation for meaningful analysis and conclusions.

Within the broader scope of ethical considerations, a trauma-informed approach was judiciously applied to ensure the dignity and safety of participants. Recognizing the potential vulnerabilities

and histories of trauma among participants, especially if they belong to sensitive populations, the study adopted key principles of a trauma-informed approach. This included creating an environment of trust, ensuring transparency, and providing choices and control to participants throughout their involvement in the study.

During the participant consent process, the trauma-informed approach played a pivotal role. The language and methodology of obtaining consent were crafted with sensitivity, ensuring that participants felt respected and heard. The process emphasized clarity, with every effort made to avoid retraumatizing participants or evoking distressing memories. Participants were informed of their rights, the measures in place to protect their confidentiality, and the purpose of the research in a manner that was both transparent and compassionate.

Moreover, specific ethical considerations for researching Veterans necessitated a deeper trauma-informed approach. Recognizing their unique experiences and potential trauma histories, extra measures were taken to ensure participants understood they were not obliged to complete the survey and could withdraw at any point freely.

In essence, the trauma-informed approach was interwoven throughout the research methodology to prioritize the safety, respect, and well-being of all participants, ensuring that their experiences within the study were affirming and supportive (Price et al., n.d.; Wilder Research, 2016).

Population

Inclusion Criteria

In this section, the selection criteria for participants in this mixed-methods research study are described. The outline for these criteria are shown in Appendix C. These criteria were established to select a representative sample of Military Veterans who have completed the Transition Assistance Program, ensuring alignment with the research objectives. Ethical considerations in participant selection have been prioritized to enhance the validity and reliability of the study's findings. For contextual understanding, it's pertinent to note the demographic distribution of Veterans across the United States Armed Services as reported by the Veterans Administration in 2022: 47% from the Army, 23% from the Navy, 19% from the Air Force, and 12% from the

Marines(Office of Policy and Planning, 2010). This data serves as a benchmark for understanding the broader military demographic.

1. **Status as a Military Veteran:** Minimum of 180 days of U.S. military service and an honorable discharge, excluding medical discharges (Hooper, 2021).
2. **Status as a Post-9/11 Military Veteran:** Same as above with the added condition of having transitioned out of the military after September 11, 2001.
3. **Successful Transition:** Completion of the Transition Assistance Program.
4. **Geographical Location:** Participants from across the world were considered, ensuring a geographically diverse sample.

Exclusion Criteria

The study will exclude individuals who do not meet the inclusion criteria outlined in Section 3.6.1. Additionally, participants who do not provide informed consent to participate in the study or provide incomplete responses to the survey questions were excluded from the final analysis. Incomplete responses refer to instances where participants fail to provide information for specific survey questions; however, any provided information was included for the questions where data is available.

Due to the Coast Guard's dual role as part of both the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security it is excluded from this study. According to the U.S. Coast Guard (2014), unlike the other military branches, Coast Guard members may have duties tied to law enforcement, maritime security, and search and rescue, among others. These unique responsibilities might skew the survey results or necessitate additional variables, complicating the study's design and interpretation. Therefore, their exclusion ensures a more homogeneous sample, allowing for a focused analysis on the Transition Assistance Program's efficacy for the majority of service branches (U.S. Coast Guard, 2014).

Participant Consent

In this section is an outline of the procedures and details related to obtaining informed consent from study participants. Participant consent is a crucial aspect of ethical research practices, and it was integral to this study's methodology.

Initial Informed Consent

At the outset of the study, participants were presented with an initial informed consent statement. This statement provided participants with essential information about the research, including its voluntary nature, the ability to withdraw at any time without penalty, and the researchers' contact information for questions or concerns. Participants were informed that their participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and they could choose not to participate without any adverse consequences. By proceeding with the survey, participants provided informed consent to participate in the study. This initial consent statement is included in Appendix I.

Verification of Understanding

Within the survey, a follow-up question (Q15) was included to confirm participants' understanding that their participation was voluntary and that they could opt out of the study at any time without fear of retribution. This verification step was implemented to ensure that participants fully comprehended their rights and the voluntary nature of their participation.

Protection of Confidentiality

Participants were also informed about the measures taken to protect the confidentiality of their responses. Specifically, it was explained that data would be securely stored on Purdue University's secure cloud content management platform on Box.com, with access limited to designated researchers (Dr. Anne Lucietto and Nanci Askew). Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential, and any identifying information would be safeguarded.

Contact Information

To address any questions, comments, or concerns related to the research project, participants were provided with contact information for the primary researchers, Dr. Anne Lucietto and Nanci Askew. Additionally, a link to Purdue University's Hotline for anonymous reporting was shared for added transparency and participant support.

Voluntary Participation

It was emphasized throughout the informed consent process that participation in the research was entirely voluntary. Participants were made aware that they had the freedom to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any point without facing any repercussions.

This informed consent process adheres to ethical research principles and ensures that participants' rights and well-being were safeguarded throughout the study. It also aligns with Purdue University's ethical guidelines and Institutional Review Board protocols.

Sample Framework

In this section is a description of the framework employed to determine the sample size for this research study. A well-considered sample size is pivotal in ensuring the study's robustness and its capacity to yield meaningful findings.

Rationale for Sample Size

The rationale behind the selected sample size is underpinned by the objective of this study, which is to comprehensively explore Veterans' perspectives on the Transition Assistance Program. The aim is to gather insights from a minimum of ten Veterans representing each branch of the United States military. This approach facilitates a thorough examination of their opinions regarding Transition Assistance Program, encompassing diverse viewpoints and experiences.

The approach to sample size determination is informed by existing research recommendations. Adams (2019) suggests a minimum of 10 participants to ensure relevance to current Transition Assistance Program training.

Alignment with Veterans Administration Ratios

To ensure a representative sample for this research, the goal is to align the study's participant distribution with that of the service branch distribution reported by the Veterans Administration for the year 2022. Specifically, the target distribution aims for 47% Army, 23% Navy, 12% Marines, and 19% Air Force.

This distribution was derived from data provided by the Veterans Administration, which was available in an Excel format from their official website. After exporting the dataset, percentages for each military branch were calculated based on the total number of recorded Veterans for that year. These calculated percentages offer a benchmark against which the study's sample can be compared, ensuring representativeness and alignment with broader military demographics (Office of Policy and Planning, 2010) .

Participant Eligibility Criteria

Participants in this study are nonrandomly selected Veterans from the United States military. For this research, a Veteran is defined as an individual who has actively served in the military for at least 180 days and received an honorable discharge (Hooper, 2021). Eligibility extends to those who have successfully transitioned out of the military with an honorable discharge, excluding medical discharges.

In conclusion, the chosen sample size is guided by the research objectives, literature recommendations, and a commitment to reflect the Veterans Administration's service branch distribution.

Possible Issues

Qualitative researchers have encountered several issues related to sample sizes and saturation in their research. Issues such as (but not limited to) sample size, saturation, and the quality of the data.

Mixed method studies concerning American Veterans may face several issues related to sampling, recruitment, and data collection. Issues such as difficulty recruiting participants, bias in sample selection, challenges in collecting and analyzing data, ethical considerations, and access to resources.

Difficulty Recruiting Participants

Veterans may be difficult to reach and recruit for research studies due to factors such as geographic dispersion, lack of trust in researchers or the medical system, and competing demands on their time (Hitch et al., 2023).

Bias in Sample Selection

Mixed method studies may be subject to bias if the participants are not representative of the larger population of American Veterans. For example, Veterans who participate in research studies may be more likely to have positive experiences with the Veterans Affairs healthcare system or to be more engaged in their own healthcare (Kauth et al., 2010).

Challenges in Collecting and Analyzing Data

Mixed method studies may face challenges in collecting and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data in a way that is meaningful and useful. For example, combining data from different sources may require careful attention to data management and analysis techniques (O’Cathain et al., 2010).

Ethical Considerations

Mixed method studies involving American Veterans may raise ethical concerns related to confidentiality, privacy, and informed consent. For example, researchers may need to ensure that Veterans are fully informed about the risks and benefits of participating in the study and that their privacy and confidentiality are protected (Hitch et al., 2023).

Access to Resources

Mixed method studies may require access to resources such as funding, specialized equipment, and trained personnel. This may be a particular challenge for studies involving American Veterans, as resources for Veterans' healthcare and research may be limited (Hitch et al., 2023).

Overall, mixed method studies involving American Veterans may face several challenges related to recruitment, data collection and analysis, and ethical considerations. Researchers conducting

mixed method studies in this population should carefully consider these issues and develop strategies to address them.

Sample size

Qualitative research typically involves small sample sizes, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. However, the appropriate sample size in qualitative research is determined by factors such as the research question, the nature and complexity of the phenomenon being studied, and the data collection and analysis methods used (Sandelowski, 1995). Some researchers have argued that sample size is not as important in qualitative research as in quantitative research, as the focus is on in-depth exploration rather than statistical inference (Guest et al., 2006). Creswell (2018) suggests that a small sample size (for example, 5-25 participants) is typically appropriate for most qualitative studies, since the focus is on in-depth exploration rather than statistical inference. However, some researchers have argued that larger sample sizes may be appropriate in certain contexts, such as when studying multiple subgroups within a population or when conducting cross-cultural research (Guest et al., 2006).

Saturation

Attaining saturation in mixed methods research involves combining quantitative and qualitative data until no new themes or patterns emerge from the analysis. Achieving saturation is considered an indicator of the sufficiency of the sample size and the completeness of the data collection process. However, achieving saturation can be challenging, particularly in studies that involve complex or sensitive topics (Francis et al., 2010). Researchers have suggested that achieving saturation may not always be necessary or feasible, and that other factors, such as the richness and depth of the data, should also be considered in determining the sufficiency of the sample size (Glaser et al., 1968). Creswell (2018) notes that achieving saturation is an important indicator of the completeness of the data collection process. However, he also notes that achieving saturation can be challenging, particularly in studies that involve complex or sensitive topics. Creswell suggests that researchers should aim to achieve theoretical saturation, which involves reaching a point where no new themes or insights emerge from the data, rather than simply data saturation.

Data Quality

The quality of the data collected in qualitative research can impact the sample size and saturation. Poor data quality, such as incomplete or inconsistent data, can make it difficult to achieve saturation or to draw meaningful conclusions from the data (Saunders et al., 2018). Researchers must ensure that they collect high-quality data through methods such as thorough training of interviewers, pilot testing of data collection instruments, and careful documentation of the data collection process (Miles et al., 2014). Creswell (2018) notes that the quality of the data collected in qualitative research can impact the sample size and saturation. Creswell suggests that researchers must take steps to ensure the quality of the data, such as through training of interviewers, pilot testing of data collection instruments, and careful documentation of the data collection process.

Research triangulation can be conducted on a study that involves collecting people's opinions. Triangulation is a methodological approach that involves using multiple sources, methods, and perspectives to study a phenomenon, with the goal of improving the validity and reliability of the findings.

According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2017), triangulation can be achieved in opinion studies by using multiple data sources such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups to gather data from different perspectives. Additionally, researchers may use secondary sources such as published research, government reports, or news articles to provide additional context and perspective.

By using multiple methods and sources to gather data, researchers can compare and contrast the findings, identify patterns and inconsistencies, and gain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied. This can improve the validity and reliability of the findings, as well as provide a more nuanced and complete picture of people's opinions on the topic being studied.

Data Analysis

As a mixed methods study, information was interpreted then a narration and table and chart were created to display the results (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Integration and Analysis

Upon collection, data was merged and analyzed. The quantitative findings offered a baseline, whereas the qualitative data delve into the experiential facets of Veterans' views on the Transition Assistance Program. The exploratory elements will guide further investigation, with graphical representations aiding interpretation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

Saturation Analysis Plan

Achieving saturation in mixed methods research involves combining quantitative and qualitative data until no new themes or patterns emerge from the analysis. Some ways that saturation can be achieved in mixed methods research are triangulation, concurrent design, iterative analysis, adequate sample size, data reduction, member checking, and data integration. This study utilized triangulation, concurrent design, iterative analysis, data reduction, and data integration.

Triangulation

One way to achieve saturation in mixed methods research is through triangulation, which involves using multiple data sources and methods to validate and corroborate the findings. This can include using quantitative data to validate or expand upon qualitative findings or using qualitative data to contextualize or explain quantitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

Using a concurrent design

Achieving saturation in mixed methods research can be through using a concurrent design, where the quantitative and qualitative data are collected and analyzed simultaneously. This allows for the integration of both types of data and can help identify when saturation is achieved.

Iterative analysis

Another way to achieve saturation in mixed methods research is through iterative analysis, which involves analyzing the data in an ongoing and iterative process until no new themes or patterns emerge. This can include revisiting the data multiple times, using different analytical techniques, or involving multiple analysts or coders in the analysis (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

Data reduction

Data reduction involves analyzing the data to identify key themes or patterns. This can help researchers determine when no new themes or patterns are emerging, indicating that saturation has been achieved.

Adequate sample size

A key factor in achieving saturation in mixed methods research is ensuring an adequate sample size. This can involve determining the appropriate sample size based on the research question and the type of data being collected, as well as ensuring diversity and representativeness in the sample (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

Data integration

Achieving saturation in mixed methods research also requires careful integration of the quantitative and qualitative data, which can involve comparing and contrasting the findings from the two data sources or using one data source to help explain or interpret the other (Fetters et al., 2013).

Overall, achieving saturation in mixed methods research requires careful consideration of the research question, the research design, the sample size, and the integration of the quantitative and qualitative data.

There are a minimum of two types of saturation in research, code saturation and meaning saturation. Code saturation is having enough interviews that the researcher has heard everything they need to hear before the information becomes repetitive. Meaning saturation is conducting enough interviews for the research to understand all of the information (Hennink et al., 2017)

A saturation analysis plan for mixed method research involves outlining the process for achieving data saturation, which is the point at which no new data or themes emerge from the analysis. Some general steps for making a saturation analysis plan for mixed method research include determine the research question, choose the sample, collect the data, analyze the data, determine saturation, and document the saturation analysis plan.

Research Instruments

After approval from the Institutional Review Board, data was collected as well as recruit study participants. The following instruments were used to collect data: Recruitment Letter (see Appendix G), Internet based questionnaire, and an interview guide (for participants who agree to speak directly to me). Methods of data collection for this mixed methods study was a questionnaire, interview (if desired), and observations of interview. It is important to note that while the option for an interview was available to participants upon request, no one requested one.

Specific Ethical Considerations for Research on Veterans

When gathering data from Veterans some ethical issues to be aware of include protecting all personally identifiable information about the participant (Creswell, 2012; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hogan, 2016; Kelley et al., 2003). Veterans and their families have spent their military career trained to follow Operations Security (OPSEC) guidelines to protect themselves, their family members, and their fellow service members (CDSE, n.d.; Defense Flash News, 2020). Since this study is not a mental health survey or covering traumatic events, the Veterans witnessed or experience this reduces the possibility of participation creating significant discomfort or harm to the Veteran (Murdoch et al., 2017).

Issues, both ethical and otherwise, exist in any type of research involving people (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) go on to explain several issues to consider in mixed method studies. Included in these issues are requesting and receiving approval from Purdue University's Institutional Review Board, exhibiting professional ethical standards, being transparent as to the study's purpose to allow prospective participants to decide whether they want to participate without applying any type of pressure while being sensitive to the needs of the prospective participants regardless of whether they decide to take part in the study.

Veteran contributors must give consent before participating in the study (Edwards, 2015; Hall, 2017; Hart, 2018; Kelley et al., 2003). It is important that Veterans as well as any other survey participant are shown respect, protected from potential harm, remain confidential, be fully informed about the details of the study as outlined in the framework of the Belmont Report, and provide their consent to participate (Kelley et al., 2003; OHRP, 1979).

Steps to minimize ethical issues when gathering data from Veterans include anonymizing participants by removing all military rank, job description, and branch of service they belonged to. Referring to the participant as 'participant' or 'interviewee' or other generic description keeps their identities protected (Hogan, 2016). All participant rights were protected by adherence to Purdue University's Institutional Review Board processes. The Institutional Review Board processes helps protect participants from stress or harm because of the study. The Institutional Review Board's processes ensure that any study results will not be misrepresented (Edwards, 2015; Hall, 2017; Hart, 2018). To gain consent from Veteran contributors it was necessary to collect a consent form that outlines how participants were protected (Edwards, 2015; Hart, 2018).

Creswell (2015) stresses the importance of conducting rigorous methods of research for both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of mixed methods research. By using a sampling strategy such as purposeful with a maximal variation sampling strategy, finding then getting permission from the survey participants, determining what kind of data was collected (open-ended questions – types of data were provided by participants), recording the data collected from using a validated instrument, and explaining the steps taken to process the data, which is also known as administer the process, rigorous steps were taken to conduct the study. To administer the process, it was important to explain who, what, where, when, the data was collected and how long it took to collect the data (Creswell, 2015).

To collect the opinions of Veterans their trust needed to be gained and held by being respectful and transparent (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). To gain the Veteran's cooperation it was important to learn about the software, Qualtrics, that Purdue uses for qualitative studies well enough to be able to explain how the information collected during the study is kept safe and secure.

Following Creswell's (2015) outline for rigorous research it is important to have something in place to keep data organization and storage to insure it stays valid and reliable such as the qualitative analysis software utilized by Purdue University.

Qualtrics incorporates a randomization function that assigns unique identifiers to each participant, a method essential for maintaining anonymity and ensuring equitable distribution across different conditions of a study. This system is pivotal in research, where the aim is to impartially evaluate variable impacts without bias. Utilizing a "Random Value" feature, Qualtrics generates a random

number for every respondent, which then can be utilized to both preserve participant confidentiality—by replacing personal identifiers—and to methodically randomize survey elements. This approach not only safeguards the privacy of respondents, particularly in sensitive research contexts, but also facilitates the anonymized aggregation and analysis of data, enabling researchers to draw correlations while upholding ethical standards. Qualtrics offers comprehensive instructions on leveraging this feature effectively, which are critical to examine for thorough application within research methodologies.

Data Security Plan

There is not a way to 100% guarantee the confidentiality of personally identifiable information. The data collected during this study will be kept for at least three years to meet the minimum requirements set forth by United States Department of Health & Human Services Code of Regulations, Title 45, §46.116 Protection of Human Subjects: General requirements for informed consent (HHS, 1979).

Deliverables

A deliverable is the end product. For manufacturing it is a piece part or assembly, for example a steering wheel for a parts store, or a car for an auto dealer (Simmons, 2020). For research it would be the results of the research, typically a report of the findings and whether it proves or disproves the hypothesis. Statistical significance is when the confidence level of the analysis is true 95% of the time (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020).

The deliverables for this study are the opinions of the Veterans participating in the study on the Transition Assistance Program.

Validity

“Content validity is the degree to which elements of an assessment instrument are relevant to and representative of the targeted construct for a particular assessment” (Haynes et al., 1995, p. 238). Criterion-related validity is when the items to be measured are divided based on the criteria they are supposed to predict (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020). An example would be gender being a measure

for diversity of a business. Construct validity is how well the measure fits the theory of the design (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020).

The quantity of data needed to achieve validity in a mixed methods study depends on various factors, including the research question, the sample size, and the data collection and analysis methods used. There is no standard or fixed quantity of data required to achieve validity in mixed methods research. However, researchers must ensure that they have collected enough data to provide rich and detailed information to address the research question(s) and achieve a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

Some experts recommend that mixed methods studies should aim for data saturation, which means that data collection is continued until no new themes or insights emerge from the data (Guest et al., 2006). Others suggest that researchers should aim to collect sufficient data to allow for a meaningful and thorough analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Therefore, the quantity of data needed to achieve validity in mixed methods research depends on the research question, the nature of the phenomenon being studied, and the research design, and can vary widely depending on these factors.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a key concern in qualitative research. Trustworthiness refers to the extent to which the research findings accurately and faithfully represent the perspectives and experiences of the participants being studied. Several issues related to trustworthiness in the collection and analysis of qualitative data include credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

Credibility means the degree that research findings accurately reflect the views and experiences of the participants. To ensure credibility, researchers need to establish rapport and trust with participants, ensure that the data collected is rich and detailed, and triangulate the data from multiple sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability addresses the degree that the research findings can be transferred to other contexts or settings. To ensure transferability, researchers need to provide rich descriptions of the study

context, participants, and research process, and include detailed data analysis and interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability indicates to the consistency and stability of the research findings over time. To ensure dependability, researchers need to document the research process, including decisions made, methods used, and changes made during the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Confirmability refers to the objectivity and neutrality of the research findings. To ensure confirmability, researchers need to be reflexive about their own biases and perspectives, use an audit trail to document the research process, and involve multiple researchers in the data analysis process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Conclusion

In this mixed-methods research dissertation, a rigorous and adaptable framework was employed, drawing strengths from both qualitative and quantitative data to produce detailed insights and uphold methodological integrity. The data collection strategies captured the essence of Veterans' experiences with the Transition Assistance Program, using both quantitative surveys and qualitative questions contained within the surveys to derive deep insights. This dual approach not only captured a broad spectrum of experiences but also delved deeply into individual narratives, striving for a comprehensive understanding that can inform potential enhancements in the Transition Assistance Program, and thereby better assisting Veterans in their transition to civilian life.

For a robust and holistic data collection, strategies like leveraging personal connections, collaborating with Veteran resource centers, using diverse recruitment channels, and, if necessary, implementing snowball sampling have been devised. This ensures the recruitment of a diverse set of military Veterans, mirroring the wider population, and contributed substantially to the research objectives. Maintaining ethical standards is paramount. With the Institutional Review Board at Purdue University ensuring the study's ethical conduct, the welfare and rights of human subjects remained a top priority, all while achieving meaningful insights.

While conducting qualitative research, there have been challenges, as noted by researchers including Creswell, regarding sample sizes and achieving saturation. Determining an appropriate

sample size and achieving saturation necessitated a careful balance between the research question, the nature of the studied phenomenon, and the quality of data collected. For the sake of trustworthiness, transparency and systematic approaches were essential in collecting and analyzing qualitative data. Documenting each step, being self-aware of biases, and employing various methods for validation solidifies the credibility of the research findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2012; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

Introduction

The transition from military service to civilian life is a complex and significant phase for service members and Veterans. In alignment with the research questions and hypotheses formulated in Chapter 1, this chapter focuses on presenting the empirical findings of the study. Using psychologist Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs as a conceptual framework (Gepp, 2022; *Maslow's Hierarchy of Basic Needs*, 2011), this chapter details the quantitative and qualitative data collected to test the hypotheses that the Transition Assistance Program meets Veterans' needs ($H1_1$) and expectations ($H2_1$), against the alternative hypotheses ($H1_0$ and $H2_0$).

Adhering to Creswell's guidelines for mixed-methods research (Creswell, 2015; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), this chapter lays out the data gathered from Veterans who have transitioned from military service after September 11, 2001. The aim is to provide a comprehensive understanding of Veterans' experiences during their transition to civilian life, focusing specifically on their interactions with the Transition Assistance Program. However, the interpretation, implications, and recommendations based on these findings will be reserved for Chapter 5.

The chapter is organized to reflect the sequence of research questions by presenting the data for each question. Importantly, this chapter serves as a foundation for Chapter 5, where the data will be interpreted and offer actionable insights aimed at enhancing the Transition Assistance Program.

Recognizing the importance of successful reintegration of Veterans into society, this chapter aims to provide an evidence-based presentation of the challenges and opportunities that Veterans encounter during their transition. Chapter 5 will build on these findings to offer a comprehensive discussion and set of recommendations.

Survey Completion Percentage Distribution Analysis

The study incorporated 18 surveys, all integral to its comprehensiveness. Figure 2 visually represents survey completion percentages, revealing participant engagement distribution and valuable response patterns insights. This chart is a pivotal element of the findings, emphasizing the extent of survey completion within the diverse sample.

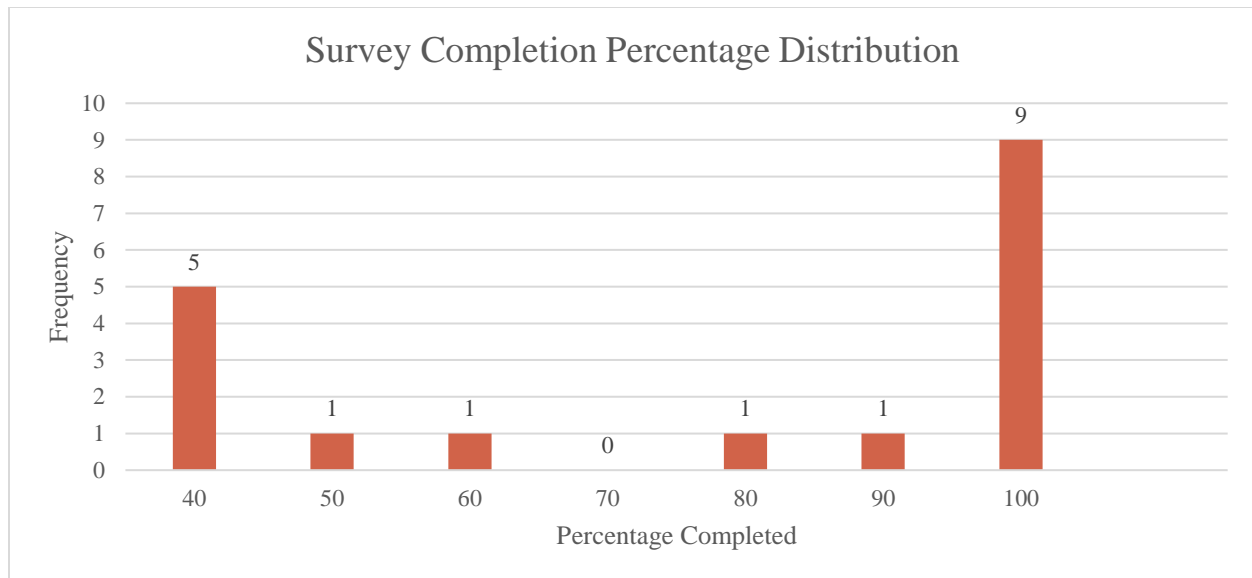


Figure 2: Survey Completion Percentage Distribution (n = 18)

Demographics

This section delves into the demographics of the survey participants. Detailed insights are provided, ranging from military service specifics to personal attributes. Through various figures and tables, this section offers a comprehensive overview of the participants' backgrounds, service history, and personal details, enabling a thorough understanding of the survey's respondent profile.

Branch of Service

Participants were asked which branch of service they served in. The results of that question are shown in Figure 3.

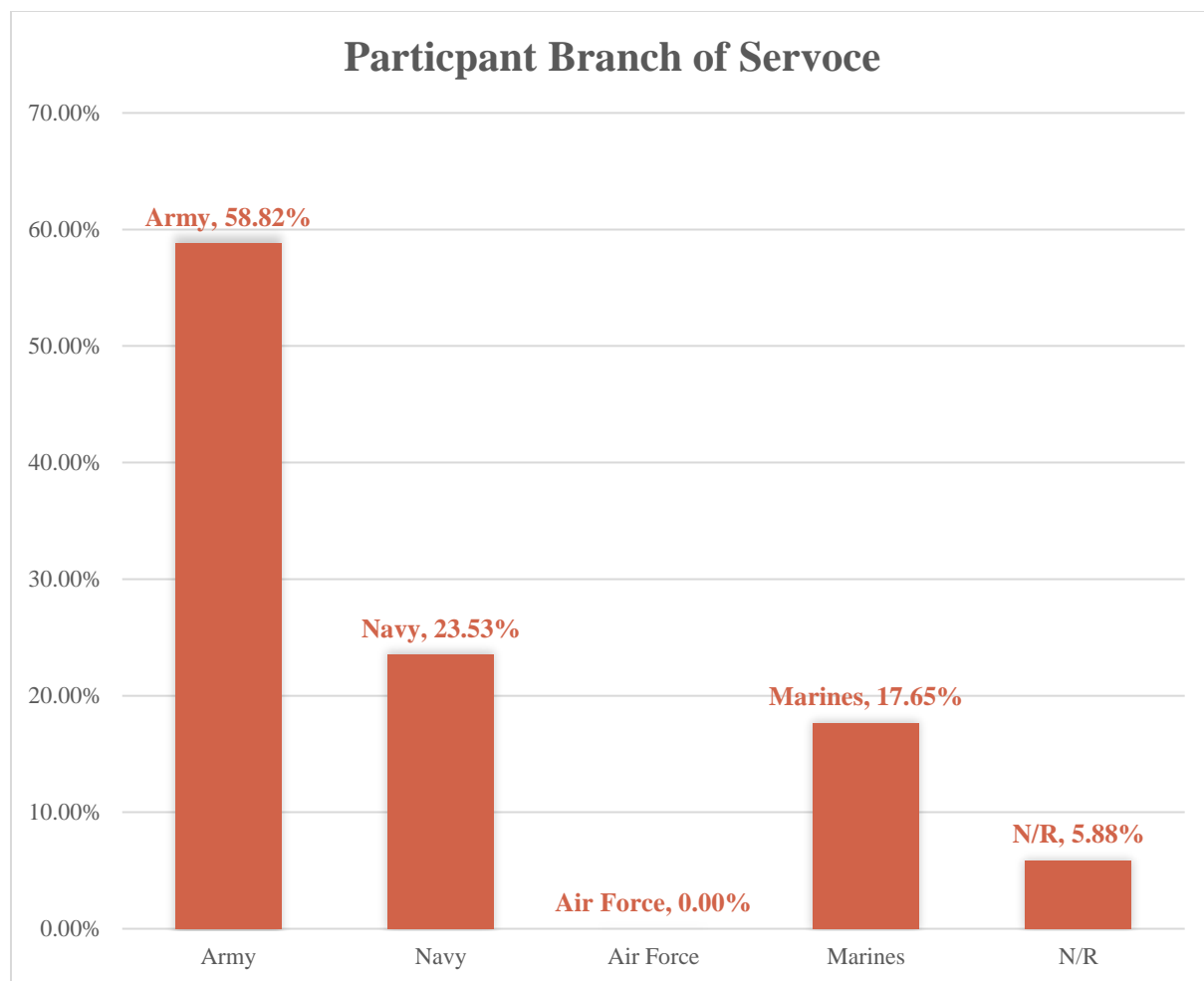


Figure 3. Branch of Service (n = 17)

Participant's Military Occupation

The dataset consists of 16 unique responses, each detailing a specific military occupation. Some participants provided their military occupational specialty code (MOS) which are included in the table. The occupations are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant's Military Occupation (n = 16)

<u>MOS Code</u>	<u>Military Occupational Specialty</u>
6694	Aviation Logistics Information Management System (ALIMS)
15Y	Armament, Electrical, and Avionics for the AH64D Longbow Apache
13B 92W 15H	Cannon Crewmember Water Treatment Specialist Aircraft Pneudraulics Repairer (Multiple Occupations)
	Infantryman
	Ordinance Officer
	SEAL
	Explosive Ordinance Disposal
13B	Cannon Crewmember
	Combat Engineer
	Critical Skills Operator and Field Radio Operator
14H	Enhanced Early Warning Systems Operator
	Hull Maintenance Technician HT (Coded Welder)
31B	Military Police
CTM	Crypto Technician Maintenance
88M	Motor Transport Operator
	Radar Technician

Participant's Length of Enlistment

Participants were asked how long they served in the military. The results are shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4. Years of Service (n = 16)

Participant Separation Timeline

Participants were asked what month and year they separated from the military. Figure 5 displays their responses.

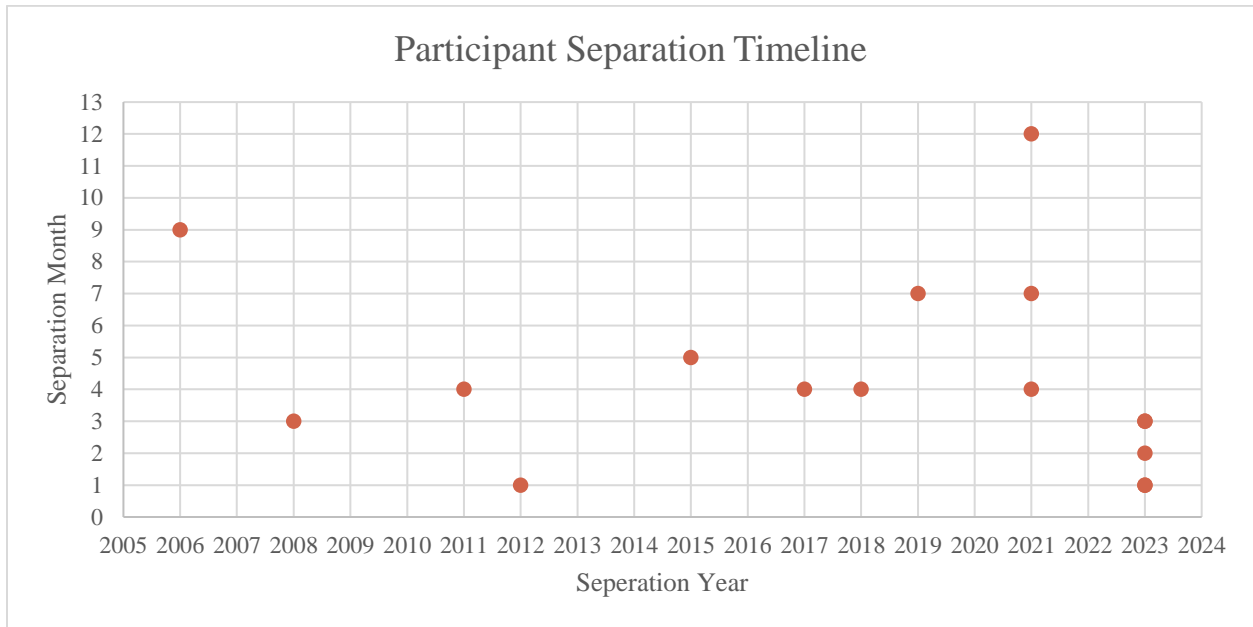


Figure 5. Participant Separation Timeline (n = 16)

Participant Age

The survey asked for the ages of the participants. The frequency chart in Figure 6 displays the results.

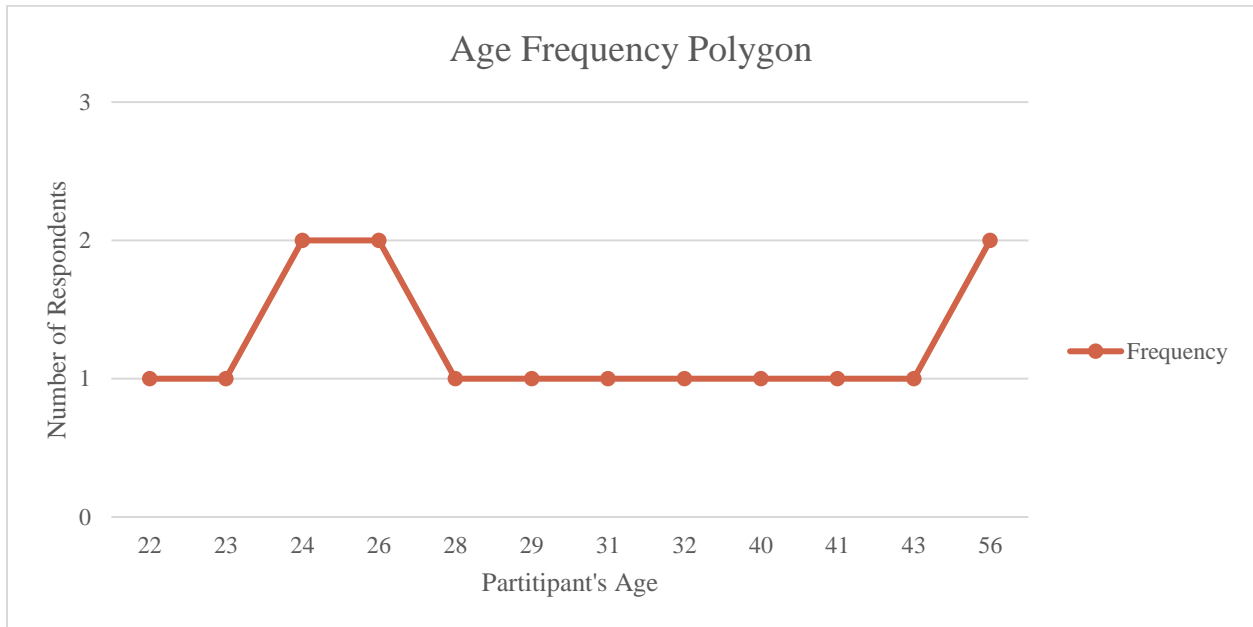


Figure 6. Age Frequency Polygon (n = 15)

Participant Gender

Figure 7 illustrates the gender distribution among survey participants. It provides a visual breakdown of the gender representation in the responses received.

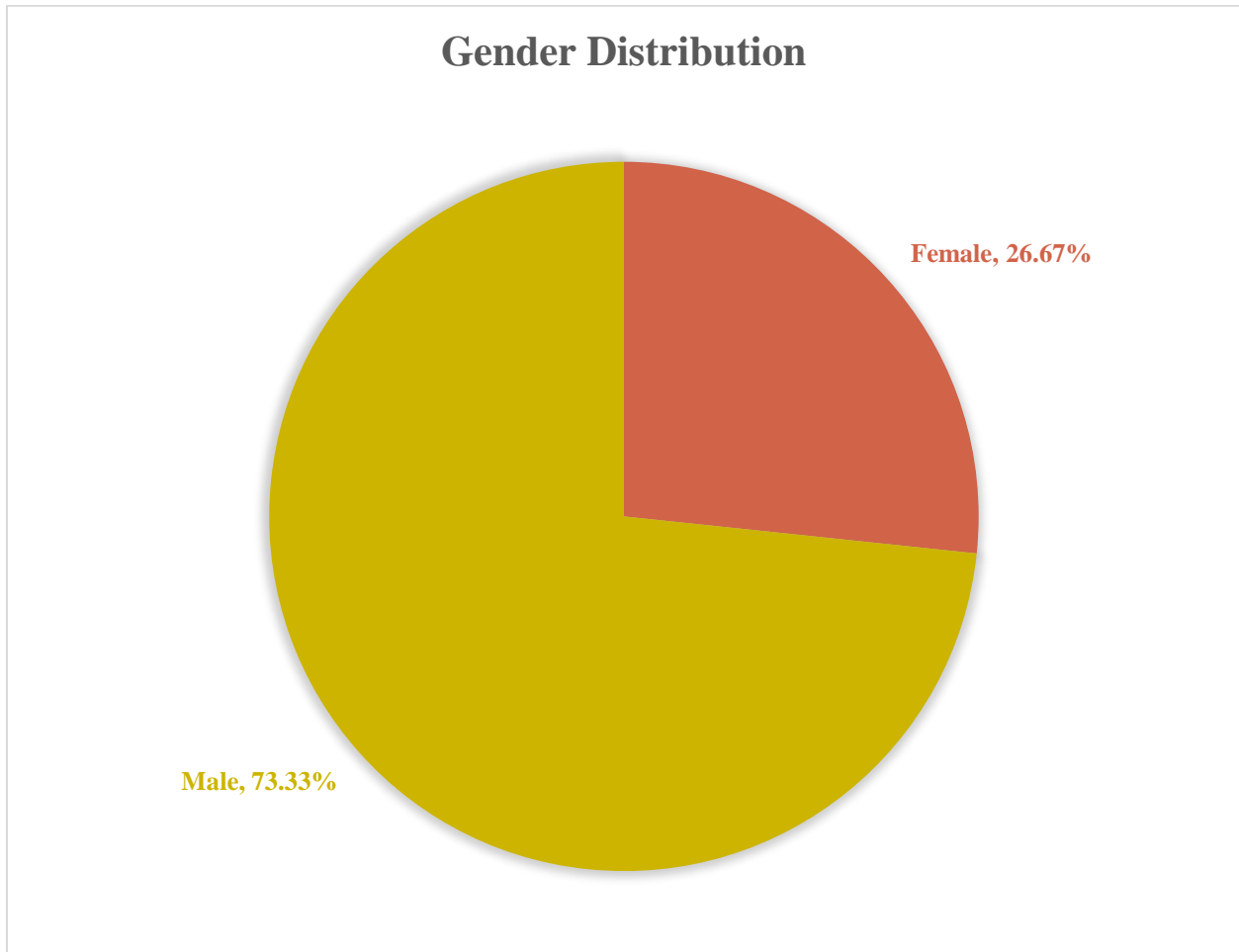


Figure 7. Gender Distribution (n = 15)

Participant Education Level

Figure 8 depicts the educational backgrounds of those who participated in the survey. This visualization highlights the diverse educational achievements of the respondents.

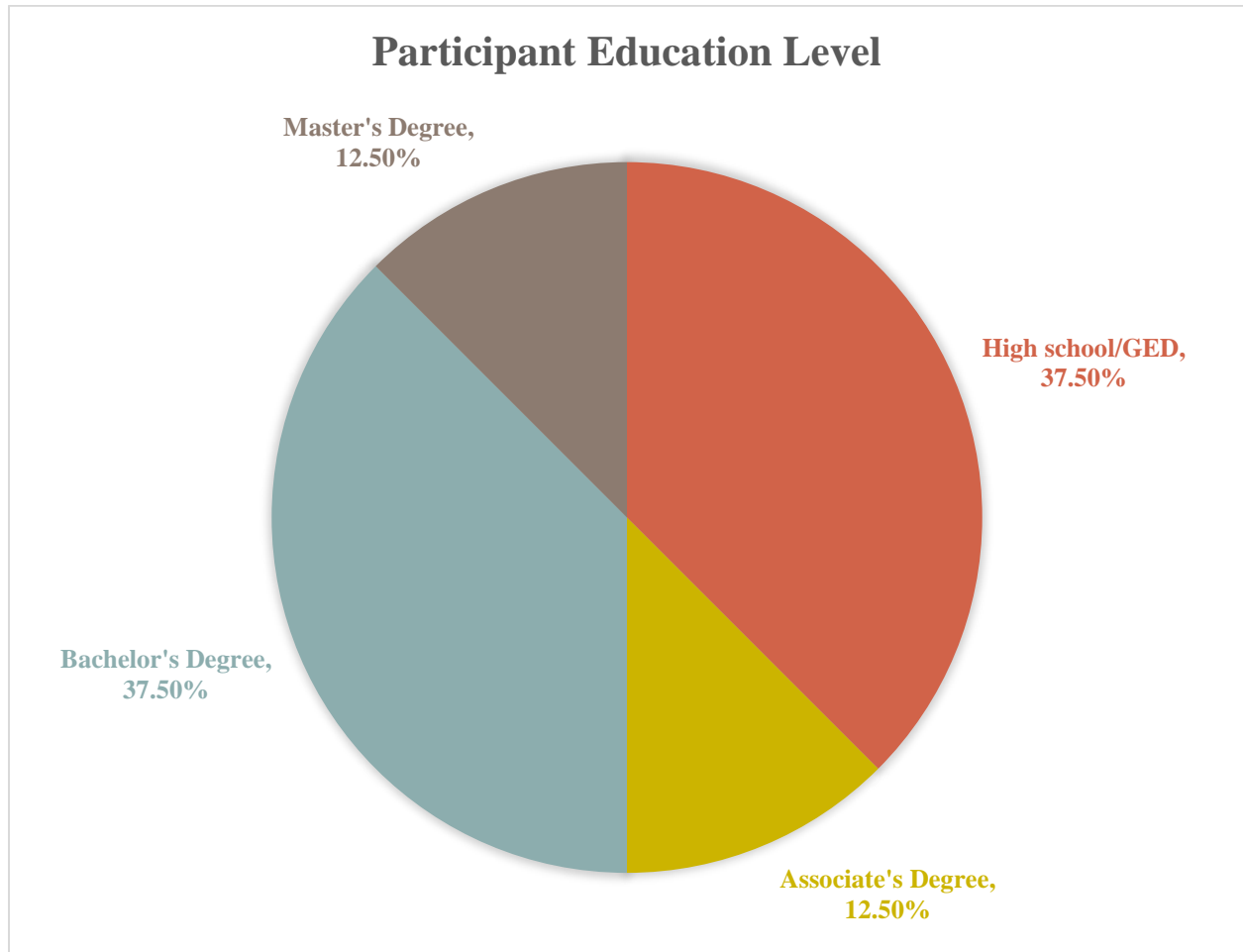


Figure 8. Participant Education Level (n = 16)

Participant's Household Income

Figure 9 presents an overview of the annual household earnings among the survey's respondents. The chart offers insight into the financial landscapes of the participants' households.

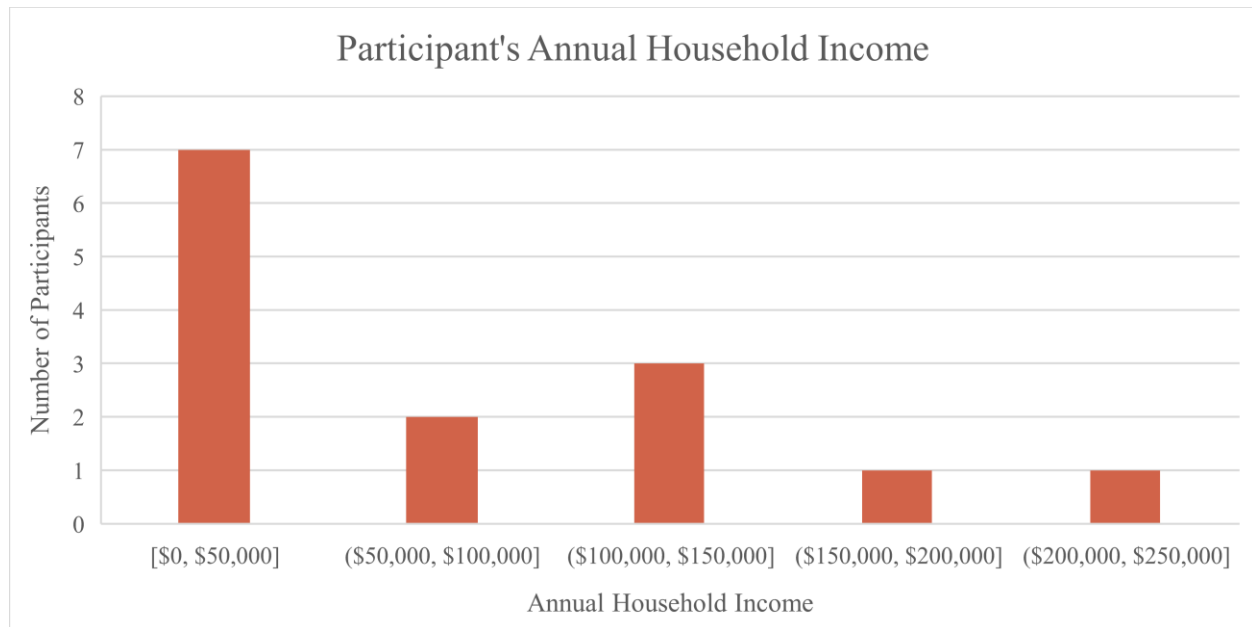


Figure 9. Participant's Annual Household Income (n = 14)

Participant's Ethnicity

Figure 10 displays the ethnic composition of those who took part in the survey. This visual representation captures the diverse backgrounds of the respondents.

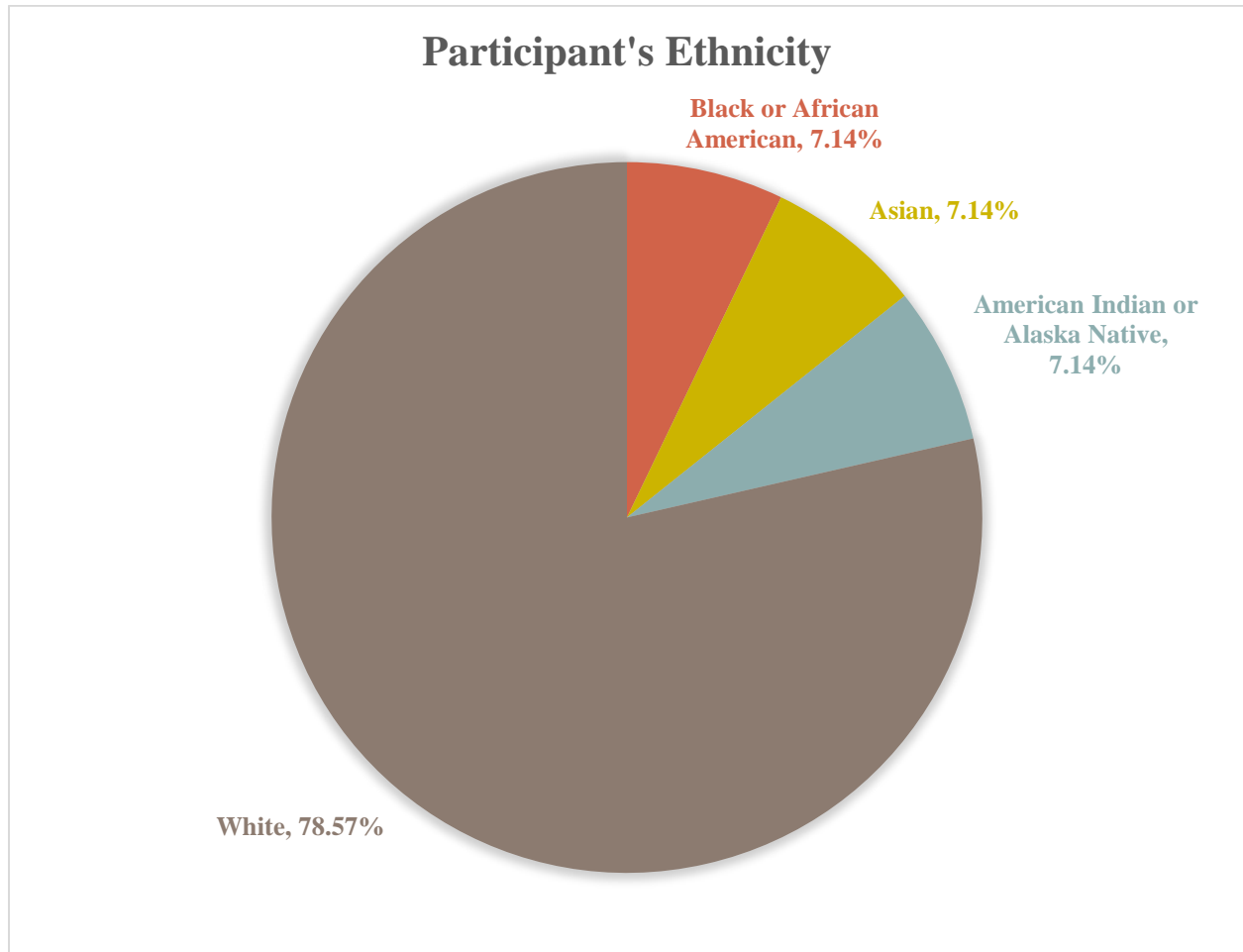


Figure 10. Participant's Ethnicity (n = 14)

Participant's Marital Status

Figure 11 provides a breakdown of the marital circumstances of our respondents. The chart sheds light on the varied relationship statuses among the survey participants.

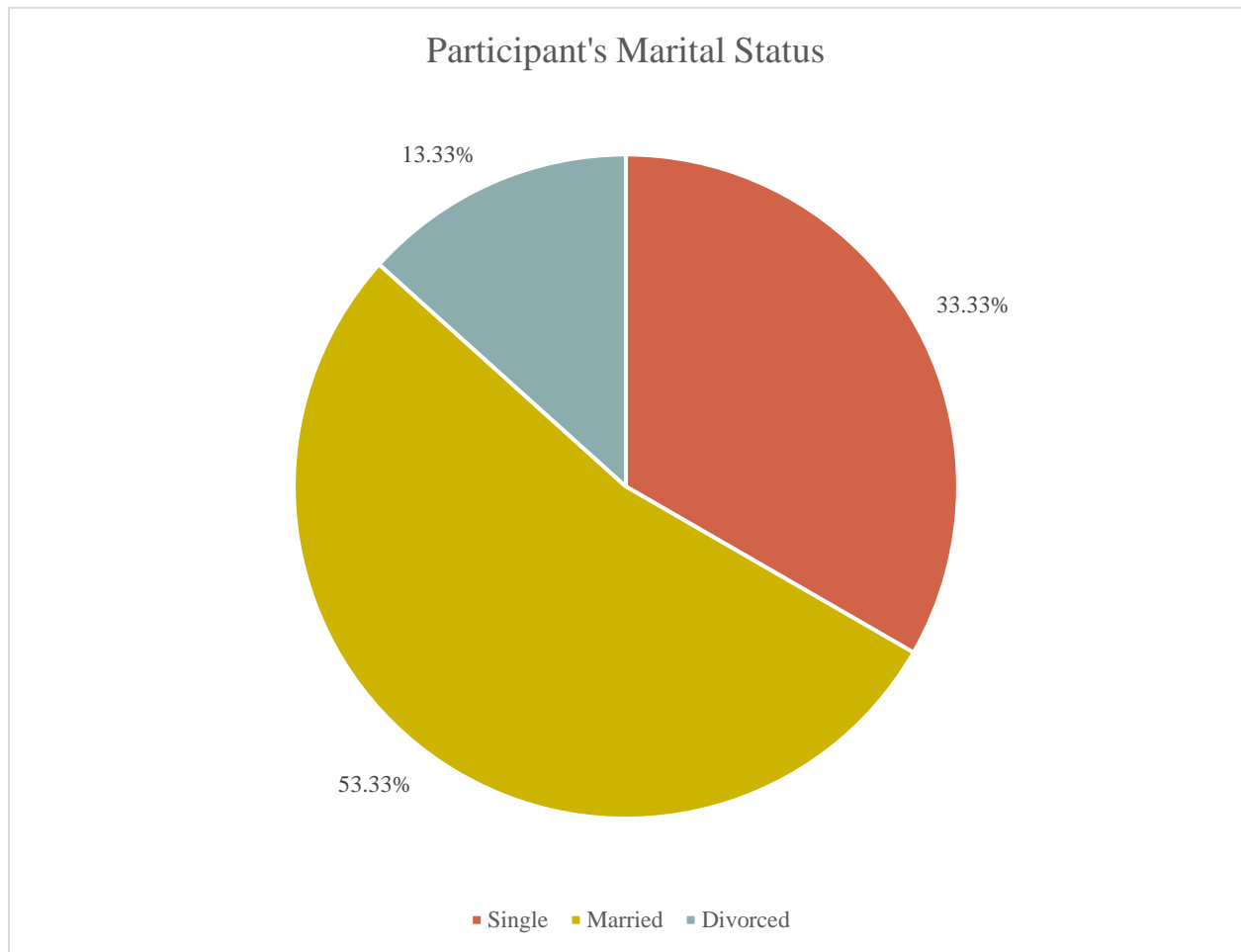


Figure 11. Participant's Marital Status (n = 15)

Participant's Employment Status

Figure 12 illustrates the different employment categories reported by those surveyed. This pie chart gives a visual representation of how participants identified in terms of their work status.

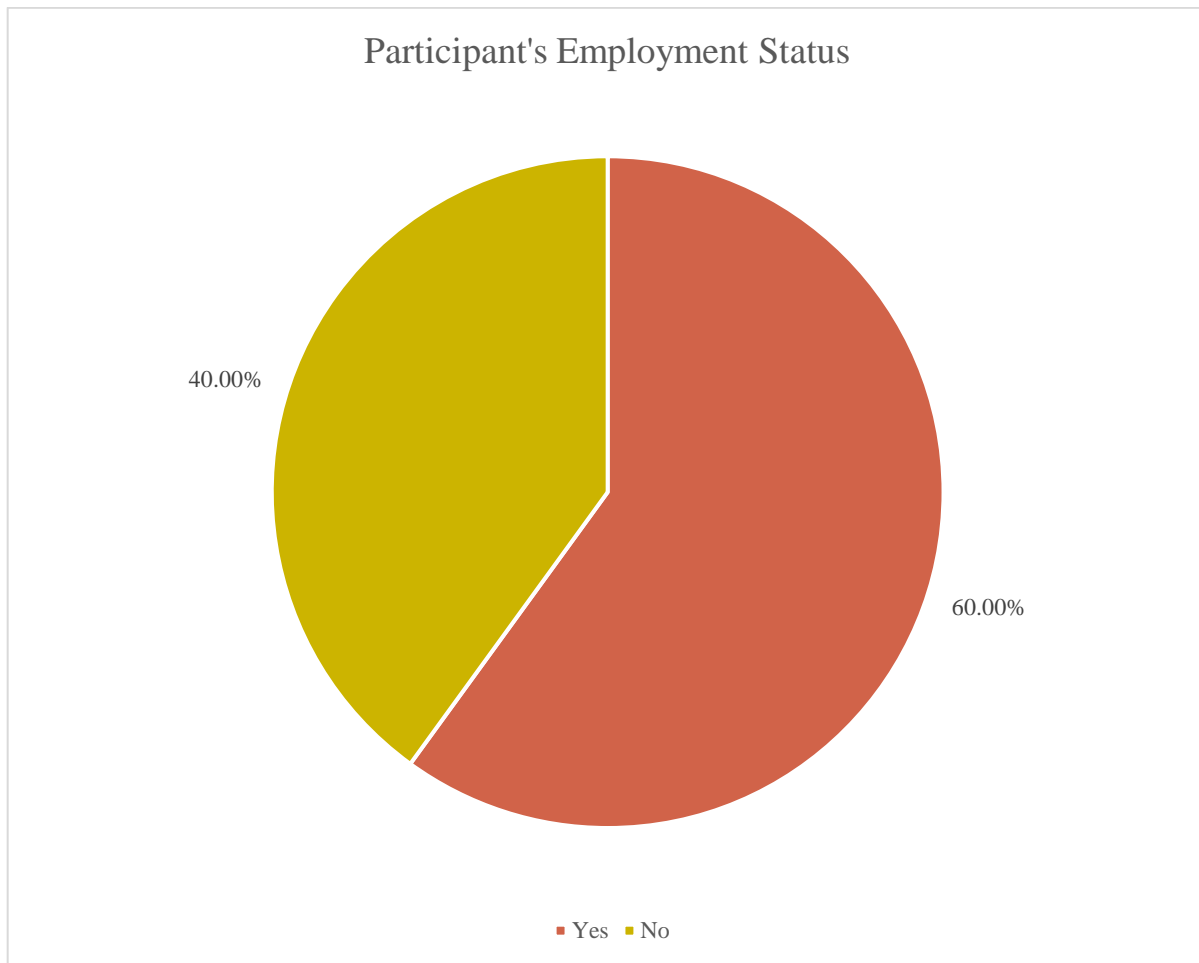


Figure 12. Participant's Employment Status (n = 15)

Participant's Zip Code

Table 2 presents the geographical locations of the study participants, identified by their provided zip codes. The corresponding city and state were determined using internet research based on these zip codes.

Table 2. Participant's Zip Code (n = 13)

Participants Zip Code	City, State
77521	Baytown, Texas
9366	Armed Forces Middle East
47906	West Lafayette, Indiana
23509	Norfolk, Virginia
6511	New Haven, Connecticut
84765	Santa Clara, Utah
11418	Richmond Hill, New York
11414	Howard Beach, New York
31548	Kingsland, Georgia
85233	Gilbert, Arizona
6351	Jewett City, Connecticut
33056	Carol City, Florida
12538	Hyde Park, New York

Number of Siblings

Figure 13 presents a combo chart detailing the sibling count for each respondent. This visualization offers insight into the familial backgrounds of the survey participants.

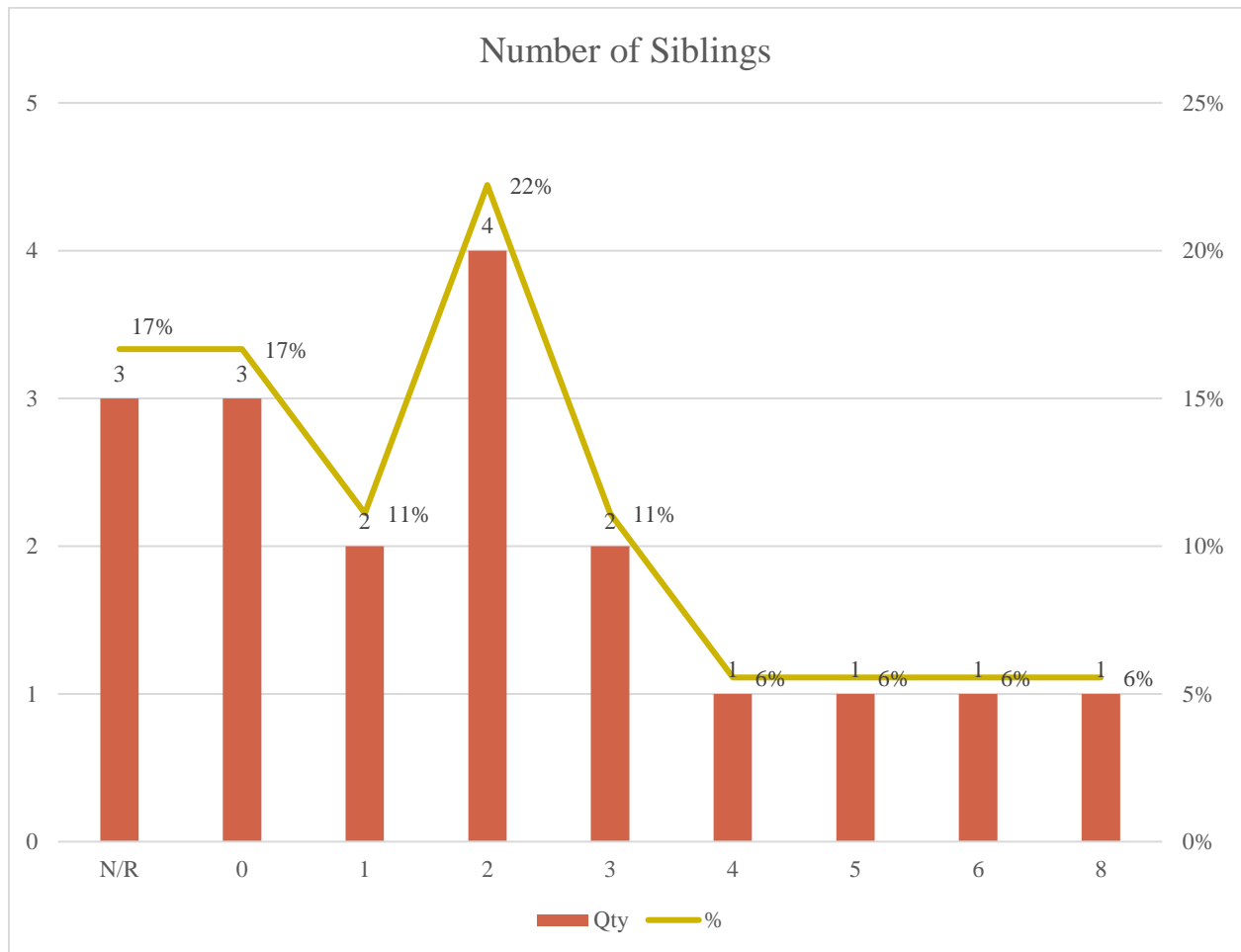


Figure 13. Number of Siblings (n = 15)

Birth Order

Figure 14 showcases a bar chart illustrating the frequency of birth positions among the respondents. This chart provides a perspective on how many participants identify as the firstborn, middle child, youngest, or only child.

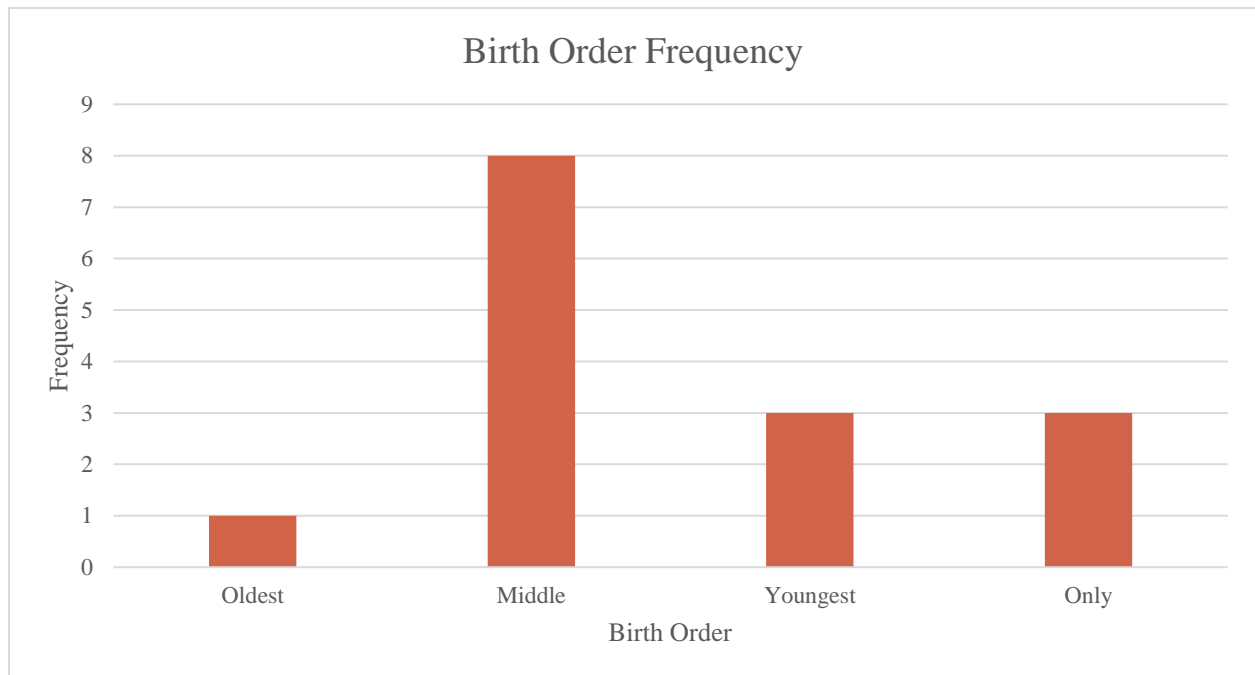


Figure 14. Birth Order Frequency (n = 15)

Participation is Optional

Figure 15 presents a pie chart delineating the participants' acknowledgment regarding the voluntary nature of their survey participation. This visualization offers insight into the percentage of respondents who are aware that their involvement is voluntary.

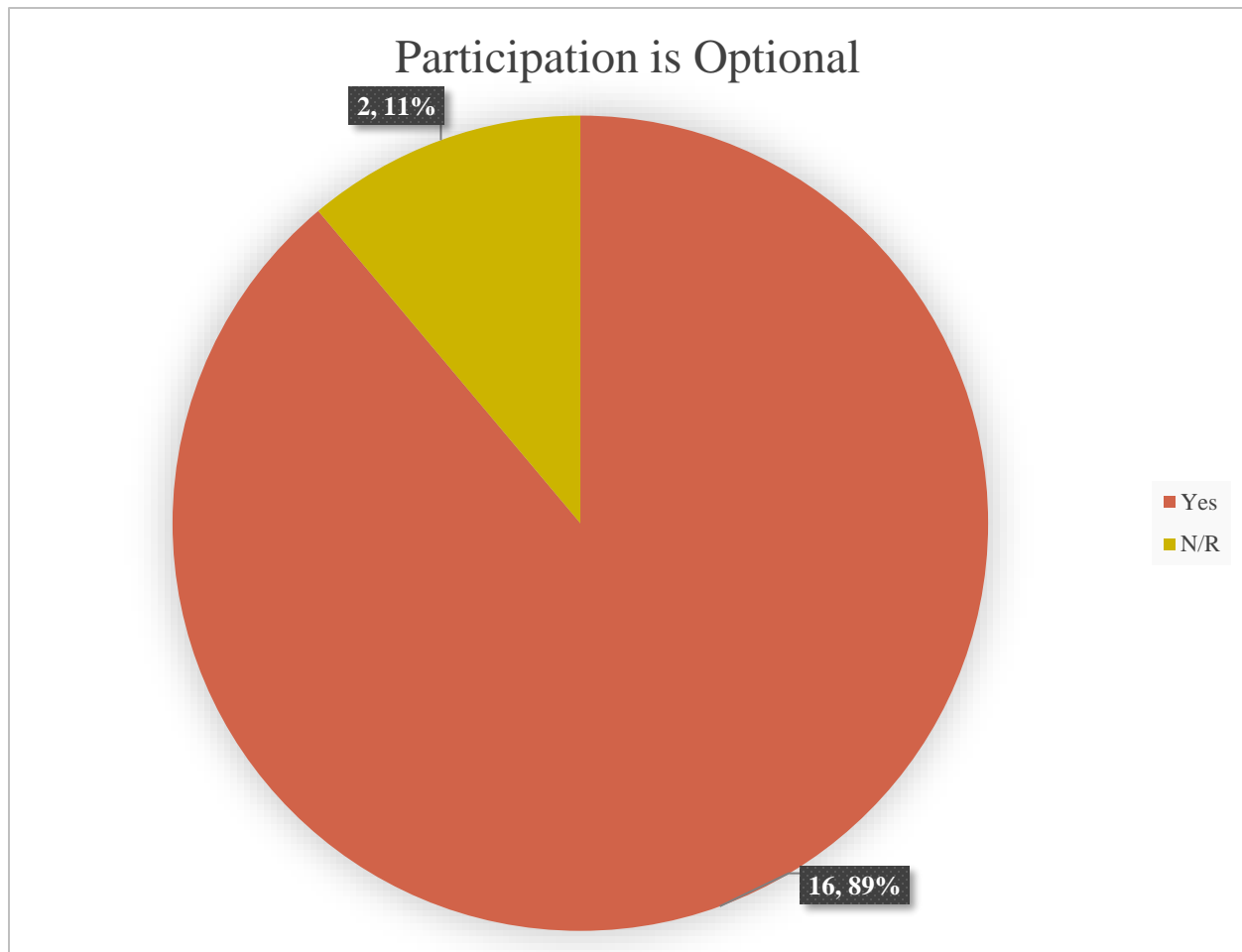


Figure 15. Participation is Optional (n = 16)

Program Evaluation and Effectiveness

Section 4.3 focuses on the evaluation and effectiveness of the Transition Assistance Program and its impact on participants' transition from military service to civilian employment. This section includes multiple tables and figures that collate participant feedback, experiences, and perceptions, offering a comprehensive look at the program's scope, content, and areas for improvement. From

gauging job readiness to examining participants' views on the Department of Defense's Transition Assistance Program, this section aggregates participant feedback on various aspects of the program, from its content and structure to its impact on job readiness and transition to civilian life.

Transition Assistance Program Impact and Job Readiness

Table 3 compiles the feedback from participants about their experiences transitioning and preparedness for employment post-military. This table captures the nuances and sentiments expressed by the respondents about their journey from service to civilian job market readiness.

Table 3. Transition Assistance Experience Feedback (n = 11)

<u>Category</u>	<u>Feedback</u>
Program Overview	TAPS instructs on securing employment but does not guide on 1) identifying the ideal job or 2) maintaining it. It falls short in facilitating adaptation to civilian life.
Time Constraints	Due to the constrained 90-day period following deployment, the transition appeared hastened. All necessary tasks were completed, with terminal leave initiated and job interviews pursued independently.
Program Content	TAP offers a technique to convert military skills to civilian counterparts, guidance on crafting resumes, and minimal information regarding expectations after service.
Personal Experience	TAP presented challenges but was beneficial for those less acquainted with civilian life. After military service, entering college made much of TAP's information less pertinent. CSP programs appeared suitable for those transitioning to employment.
Administrative Constraints	TAP was mandatory during ETS. However, leadership emphasized other responsibilities, such as staff tasks and rotations, over the transition process.
General Sentiment	It seemed ineffective and obligatory. Merely a formality for separation without adequate preparation for civilian employment.
Improvement Suggestions	TAP provided some insights but missed practical details for pursuing a fulfilling career. Bureaucratic processes hinder progress. Emphasis should be on placing Veterans in quality roles.
Scope of Program	The transition program encompasses medical board results, retirement, VA healthcare, and Chapter 31 Vocational Rehabilitation. Various levels in TAP address distinct needs, like education or job placement.
Course Structure	Three-day extended course overwhelmed with PowerPoint content. Offered broad knowledge on locating detailed information.

Participants' Experiences with DoD TAP Services

Table 4 provides a synthesized overview of participants' experiences with the Department of Defense's Transition Assistance Program (DoD TAP) services.

Table 4. Participant Experiences with DoD TAP Services. (n = 7)

Category	Responses
Job Fairs and Information	Participants found job fairs useful; were informed on various opportunities.
Civilian Instructors	Civilian instructors provided more detailed and practical advice compared to military ones.
General Recall of Experience	Participants remembered lessons on dress codes, resume writing, and interviewing.
Formality of the Process	Some participants viewed TAP as a routine or checkbox activity.
Instructor Engagement	Mixed experiences with instructors' commitment; some found military instructors less engaging.
Employment Opportunities Highlighted	Feedback indicated limited job options, with emphasis on trucking roles.
Overall TAP Experience	Varied feedback: some found it information-rich but challenging, while others mentioned lack of support from staff NCOs.

Participant's Perception of DoD TAP's Effectiveness

Table 5 provides an aggregated view of participants' perceptions regarding the Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program and its role in aiding their transition from active duty to civilian employment.

Table 5. Perceptions of DoD TAP's Role in Transitioning to Civilian Employment (n = 7)

Category	Number of Responses	Responses
General Understanding	3	The program offered an overview of transition expectations and shared familiar job-seeking resources.
Independence in Transition	1	Took the initiative in the job search without relying on the program.
Limited Efficacy	3	The program was optional and not strongly emphasized. Some found it unhelpful, while others faced personal challenges despite the program.
Minimal Assistance	1	Received little to no help from the program.

Participant's Feedback on DoD TAP's Employment Preparation

Table 6 presents aggregated participant responses regarding areas of improvement for the DoD TAP in assisting with employment transition.

Table 6. Feedback on DoD TAP's Employment Preparation Aspects (n = 7)

Categories	Responses
Suggestions for Continuation & Follow-up	Content was valuable but lacked post-employment guidance.
Program Structure & Process Improvements	Recommends a less regimented progression, unlike a basic training routine.
More Information on External Assistance	Suggests elaborating on programs that build on TAP's foundational info.
General Feedback & Uncertainty	Unable to recall specific details.
Need for Alternative Information Delivery	Prefers a digital database with relevant resources for Veterans.
Recommendations for Additional Offerings	Suggests inclusion of pipeline programs.
No Immediate Suggestions	No current recommendations for improvements.

Participant Perception of Effectiveness of DoD TAP Preparation

Table 7 provides an aggregated summary of participants' feedback on the effectiveness of the DoD TAP in preparing them for civilian roles. Responses vary, highlighting different areas of preparation and perceived effectiveness.

Table 7. Evaluation of DoD TAP Effectiveness by Participants (n = 6)

Experience Category	Description/Insights
Effectiveness in Cultural Adjustment	Mentioned as lacking
General Effectiveness	Feedback indicating partial effectiveness, comments on military-civilian organization differences
Audience Targeting	Program perceived as targeted at younger audience; suggestion for mid-career level TAP
No Feedback	Responses indicating "No" or "N/A"
Positive Remarks	Recognized as helpful by some participants

Transition Assistance Program Needs Assessment Results

Figure 16 showcases participants' perceptions of the Transition Assistance Program meeting their needs. Responses range from strong agreement to strong disagreement.

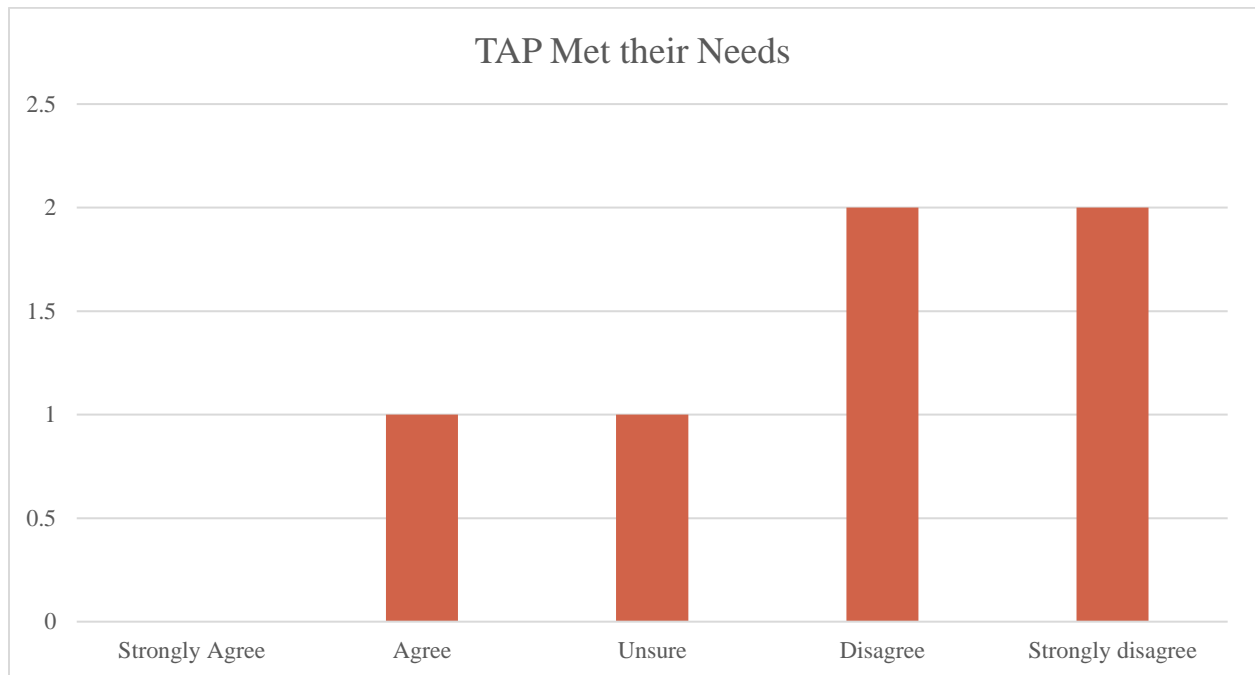


Figure 16. Participant Perceptions of TAP Effectiveness (n = 6)

Transition Assistance Program Expectations Assessment Results

Figure 17 showcases participants' responses regarding whether the Transition Assistance Program aligned with their individual expectations. Participants selected from options ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Agree" to express their level of satisfaction.

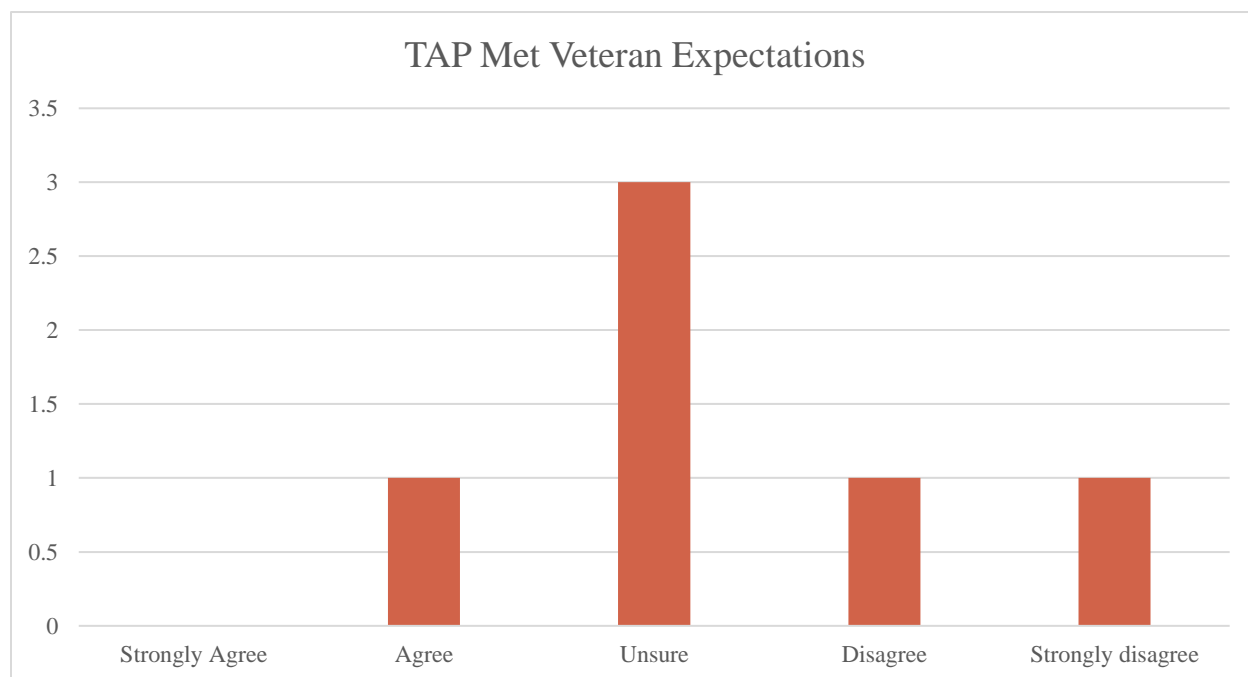


Figure 17. TAP Expectations Fulfillment Chart (n = 6)

Preparation, Strategy and Resources

Section 4.4 delves into the various strategies, resources, and preparations employed by participants for transitioning from military to civilian employment. Through a series of tables, this section explores the value of non-government transition assets, methods for self-education in post-employment, and the types of guidance sought during this crucial period. The data collectively offer a multifaceted understanding of the tools and approaches that Veterans find beneficial, or lacking, in their journey towards civilian work life.

Value of Non-Government Transition Assets

Table 8 offers a detailed look at how participants perceive the worth of non-government transition programs. Their assessments provide a lens into the effectiveness and utility of these alternative initiatives.

Table 8. Participants Value of Non-Government Transition Programs (n = 9)

<u>Response Type</u>	<u>Detail</u>
Uncertain	Unsure if options existed during transition
	Unsure
	Has not heard of it
Value Acknowledged	If you actively seek information from the organizations, it would have high value.
	Organizations offer good support, but many overlook them during the challenging transition phase, juggling military responsibilities and upcoming uncertainties.
Specific Organization Mentioned	One participant says there were only aware that the American Legion offers VSOs for disability claim assistance.
Not Utilized	No programs were used
Positive Remarks	Great organizations excel in assisting the overlooked. While numerous, Veterans are roughly 2% of the country/
Constraints	They are not used because of a lack of time and support.

Self-Education for Post-Employment

Table 9 delves into the ways participants have pursued self-education to prepare for post-employment. This table elucidates the proactive steps taken by individuals to further their knowledge and readiness for future roles.

Table 9. Post-Employment Self Education Strategies Used (n = 10)

Action / Strategy	Details/Outcome	Resources/Firms Used
Preparation for interviews	Interviewed with 6 companies in one day, Learned about benefits through this process	Bradley-Morris Incorporated
Resume building	Signed up with a firm for resume building and got presented to organizations seeking prior military members	Bradley-Morris Incorporated
Job research	Used platforms to research job requirements and researched certifications to enhance resume	Glassdoor
College application and preparation	Applied to college and took a prep course for college level math	-
Online higher education	Pursued online education during service and after separation for civilian employment	UDemy, Coursera
College education post-military	Enrolled in community college, progressed to 4-year university for B.S. Now in graduate school at St. John's University for an M.B.A.	St. John's University
Military benefits for education	Equipped with knowledge on using the GI Bill and the Yellow Ribbon program if needed	GI Bill, Yellow Ribbon Program
Education milestone	Expected to complete master's degree within six months of EAOS	-

Post-Military Employment Preparation Methods

Table 10 presents the various methods participants employed to prepare for post-military careers. This table provides insight into the strategies and resources favored by individuals as they transitioned to civilian work environments.

Table 10. Post Military Transition Steps (n = 8)

Strategy / Action	Details / Outcomes
Deployment Transition	Returned from deployment with 12 days of terminal leave.
Bradley-Morris Incorporated Assistance	Provided resume support, led to opportunities in Wyoming. Joined the American Legion for community.
Focus Area	Targeted management positions: abrupt Army exit limited planning.
Financial Preparedness	Saved significantly throughout contract; ensured financial stability post-separation.
Education & Professional Development	Completed bachelor's degree; prepared for TAP; earned college education, interned, and applied for military-credited jobs.
No Preparation	Did not prepare for post-military transition.

Advisors and Guidance for Post-Military Employment

Table 11 delves into the advisors and sources of guidance participants turned to for post-military employment. It offers a perspective on the trusted figures and resources Veterans rely on during their transition to the civilian workforce.

Table 11. Transition Advice: Sources and Guidance (n = 8)

Source of Advice	Details / Support Provided
None	Did not have time; turned gear in, started checking out of the unit.
Friends (joining the same company)	Helped with the transition process.
Fellow Veterans	Advised on financial readiness, stressors of civilian life, paths to employment.
Self	Figured it out without external advice.
Peers (who retired before)	-
Leadership and TAP service	-
Vocational Rehabilitation	Provided resources, tools, cognitive therapy. Differences noted between Hawaii, Pennsylvania, and New York services.
Parents	Financial and career guidance. Father gave advice on pursuing business, mother provided emotional and financial support.
Semper Fi Fund	Counseling, disability accommodations, finances.
VA Mental Health & Others	Helped with PTSD-related issues.

Preparation for Civilian Employment Experiences

Transitioning from active duty to civilian life presents unique challenges and preparations. Table 12 highlights the experiences and steps taken by Veterans during this pivotal phase.

Table 12. Veteran Transition Experiences and Preparations (n = 7)

Category	Responses
TAP & Transition Classes	Taps: Time was short due to recent deployment, focused on CIF return. Attended two transition classes; found them useful. Prepared by sending resumes, applying to positions, and schools for GI Bill.
Education	Started a bachelor's degree program. Thought about VocRehab covering the education for becoming a clinical social worker.
Job Application & Network	Advice: Attend and pay attention to TAP service. Contact colleges' Veteran advisors and federal job POCs.
Emotional Experience	Faced depression and PTSD. Received counseling, therapy, and medication. Multiple formal and informal counseling sessions were involved. Wanted a USMC career but was forced to transition due to injuries and PTSD.
Career Considerations	Considered military contractor, law enforcement, and becoming a clinical social worker. Influenced by father to consider business ownership/sales due to potential salary cap as LCSW.
No Preparation	Nothing

Preparation for Civilian Job Transition

Table 13 showcases the actions Veterans undertook prior to their military separation to gear up for civilian roles. It emphasizes both individual efforts and the utilization of provided resources.

Table 13. Preparation Steps for Civilian Employment Transition (n = 7)

Preparation for Transition	Responses
None	No preparatory activities taken.
Resume Building	Leveraged BMI for a seamless transition from interview to job offer before the end of service.
Job Application & Resume Maintenance	Kept resume updated throughout service. Realized job search might take around half a year and took advantage of complimentary resume assessments.
Self-Preparation	Took individual initiatives; found TAPS resources to be just a formality without much value.
Used TAPS	Engaged with the TAPS program.
None	No preparatory activities taken.
Resume Building	Leveraged BMI for a seamless transition from interview to job offer before the end of service.

Financial and Job Market Awareness

Section 4.5 focuses on the financial literacy and job market awareness of participants as they transition from military service to civilian life. This section contains tables that provide an in-depth examination of how participants perceived their financial education and the struggles or advantages they experienced while seeking employment. Through this analysis, the section aims to shed light on the challenges and opportunities that Veterans encounter in both financial management and employment search, as they navigate their way into civilian roles.

Financial Transition Feedback

Table 14 delves into the financial transition perspectives shared by participants after their military service. Insights and reflections on how they navigated the fiscal aspects of their shift to civilian life are presented.

Table 14. Financial Transition Feedback (n = 11)

<u>Category</u>	<u>Responses</u>
Limited / No Information	Information about allowances and taxes was lacking or unclear. Many found out about these details only after joining the private sector or found faster answers via search engines. Some do not remember receiving certain information at all.
Had Some Knowledge	Financial classes were offered during active duty, focusing on savings and investments. However, retention of the information from these classes was limited.
Information Overload	Information was presented rapidly in a brief duration, making it overwhelming and less beneficial.
Specific Programs	Commendation for SGLI/VGLI program, but additional support is necessary.
Uncertainty/ Can't Recall	Uncertain, memory unclear.
Insufficient Teaching	Not enough taught, had to figure out on own. Only mentioned using VA Healthcare. VA met medical needs due to disability claim.

Participants Post-Military Job Search Experiences

Table 15 captures participants' experiences in seeking civilian employment aligned with their military skills and experiences reflecting the diverse pathways taken.

Table 15. Veterans' Civilian Job Search Post-Military Experience (n = 7)

Sought Military-Related Employment	Description
Yes, found easily	Job found with ease even when unfamiliar with the role.
Yes, technical skills helped	Troubleshooting and technical skills aided in transition.
Yes, faced challenges	Interviewed multiple times without success until an overseas opportunity arose.
Yes, opted for education	Chose to pursue college and an internship outside of infantry expertise.
No	Did not seek job related to military skills.
Faced difficulties	Encountered hardships leading to homelessness.
Utilized Veteran benefits	Secured supervisory position and owned a business, leveraging Veteran privileges.

Experiences, Insights and Communication

Section 4.6 serves as a critical segment within Chapter 4, focusing specifically on the representativeness of the study sample. Aimed at ensuring credibility, this section juxtaposes the distribution of participants across various military branches in the study against the service branch distribution reported by the Veterans Administration for the year 2022. By comparing these distributions, the section evaluates the extent to which the study's sample aligns with the broader Veteran community, thereby assessing the generalizability of the research findings. The evaluation includes a detailed table and accompanying figure to offer a visual and numerical comparison, fortifying the study's methodological rigor.

Household Income Dynamics Details

Table 16 presents a comprehensive view of the shifts in household income experienced by participants during their separation process. The data offers insights into the financial adjustments and challenges encountered during this transitional phase.

Table 16. Household Income Dynamics During Separation (n = 7)

Question Topic	Response
Marital Status at Separation	Not married
Discussion during Separation	Limited discussion (in the process of separating)
Lead on Discussion	She took the lead
Earning Potential Post-Separation	Earning potential would be significantly less while completing a bachelor's degree post-military separation
Earnings Comparison	Greater earning potential due to higher education
Financial Impact	Loss of dual income for a few months; financial management is key

Steps Taken for Geographic Transition Success

Table 17 delves into the geographic transition strategies and experiences reported by the participants. This table highlights the diverse approaches and encounters individuals faced while relocating or adapting to new environments.

Table 17. Geographic Transition Strategies and Experiences (n = 9)

Category	Details
Family & Location	Went home to assist aging parents. Preferred geographic area is relative; be flexible where opportunities are. Moved frequently as a civilian.
Reason for Exit	Exited due to medical issues; more abrupt than planned.
Education & Job Prep	Applied and got accepted to college; used early separation for fall semester. Completed a bachelor's degree.
Resources Used	Attend DAV events; online local research (findhelp.org). VA regional office, Veterans outreach centers, pantries, voc rehab.
Challenges	Faced academic weaknesses; underwent counseling for PTSD. Physical pain from active-duty injuries. Financial assistance needed.
Support & Housing	Planned to return home and move back with family.

Using Social Media to Find Post Military Employment

Table 18 highlights Veterans' perspectives on the usefulness of digital platforms during their transition to post-military employment. It aggregates responses, emphasizing themes around networking, job opportunities, and platform preferences.

Table 18. Digital Platform Feedback (n = 8)

Platform	Details
General Feedback	Not reliable in 2008. Simple setup process in college. Can see workplace affiliations of connections.
LinkedIn	Useful for networking and job opportunities. Helps extend reach for job searches/postings.
Facebook	- More useful for maintaining Veteran relations. Occasionally presents job opportunities. Advises on professional development more than LinkedIn.
Usage	LinkedIn was set up in college. Facebook is seldom used, not for post-military job preparation.
Other Platforms Mentioned	Google USAJobs
No Digital Assistance	Some respondents did not use any platforms for preparation.

Improvements for Military to Civilian Transition

Table 19 presents the suggestions and insights from participants on how to improve military transition experiences. These recommendations offer a roadmap for potential enhancements to support transitioning military personnel more effectively.

Table 19. Recommendations for Enhanced Military Transition (n = 8)

Recommendation Category	Details / Examples
Cultural Transition	Treat civilian world as foreign country; workplace culture briefing
Resources & Tools	Tools found personally; VA information; Comprehensive database
Follow-up & Support	Follow-up program post-TAP; 90 and 180-day check-ins; assigned advisor
Independence Mindset	Need for self-reliance post-service; No handholding in civilian life
Retirement Information	Longer period for retirement info; Avoid information overload
Job Training & Opportunities	Pipeline programs (law enforcement, HR, programming, trades); Voc rehab consistency nationwide

Insights From Personal Career Transitions

Table 20 aggregates participant insights on military-to-civilian transition, focusing on cultural understanding, career planning, education, and networking. Each theme highlights the key recommendations drawn from their shared experiences.

Table 20. Guidelines for Military-Civilian Transition (n = 8)

Theme	Recommendations / Insights
Understanding Civilian Culture	Civilians did not go to bootcamp; they do not share a common frame of reference or culture. Treat everyone differently. The pack mentality is limiting.
Career Research & Planning	Research local cost of living if geographic preference matters. Find desired job area and speak to professionals in that industry. Research top companies on Glassdoor for insights. Plan future education and apply to courses. Get certifications before exiting the military. Save money for potential relocation needs.
Education	Get paid to go to college. Figure things out independently or find knowledgeable individuals.
Networking & Personal Growth	Start early in thinking about retirement. Network for better pay opportunities; internal connections can be key. Networking is crucial across sectors. Maintain relationships, invest in self-improvement, and avoid toxic situations.

Career and Life Satisfaction

Table 21 provides insights into the complexities faced during the transition from military to civilian life, highlighting key differences in work environment, camaraderie, and mental well-being. These reflections offer a deeper understanding of the challenges and satisfactions experienced during this significant life change.

Table 21. Transition Insights from Military to Civilian Life (n = 27)

Category	Insights
Work Environment	<p>Military experience deeply influences one's identity. Success is often found when collaborating with fellow Veterans.</p> <p>Navigating bureaucracy and decision-making in the private sector differs from military service.</p> <p>Civilian roles often emphasize stability and fear of failure, contrasting with the military's more direct approach.</p>
Psychological Safety	<p>The military offers a sense of security, knowing one cannot be easily dismissed. This contrasts with civilian jobs where the risk of failure and job loss can be significant.</p>
Satisfaction & Purpose	<p>Satisfaction is highest when working independently or with a purpose-driven team, mirroring the camaraderie found in military settings.</p>
Transition Resources	<p>While available transition programs are broad, tailored resources capturing collective lessons learned could be more beneficial.</p>
Camaraderie & Isolation	<p>The unique camaraderie in the military is hard to replicate elsewhere, potentially leading to feelings of isolation. Staying connected with military peers is essential.</p>
Life Satisfaction	<p>A successful career transition can significantly impact life satisfaction. Understanding the link between career transition and well-being is vital for overall contentment.</p>
Challenges & Mental Health	<p>Transitioning can bring about challenges like depression. It is essential to recognize and address these challenges for a successful transition.</p>

Translating Military Experience to Civilian Resumes

Table 22 presents aggregated data on participant experiences in translating military experience to civilian resumes. The content is structured based on common themes identified in the responses.

Table 22. Challenges and Approaches in Resume Translation (n = 6)

Experience Category	Description/Insights
Technical Experience (IT)	Assisted in creation of remote LANs and tactical LANs. Configured RAS, VPN Maintained servers, various software. Proficient in fabricating networks
Translation Process	Found the process challenging
Utilization of Transition Assistance	Used TAP program's keyword document. Continued working within military-industrial complex
Specific Military Role Translation	Role (12B) mentioned
Resume Building Guidance	Received coaching from Veterans. Emphasis on shortening the resume
Experience Descriptor	Mentioned as "horror"

Conveying Military Skills to Civilian Recruiters

Table 23 presents aggregated responses from military professionals on their experiences conveying skills to recruiters. It categorizes insights and the challenges faced during communication.

Table 23. Experiences Conveying Military Skills to Recruiters (n = 6)

Experience Category	Description/Insights
Recognition by Recruiters	Headhunters understood military experience
Attitudinal Value	Hired for attitude over specific skills
Language Translation Barrier	Difficulty with "civilianese" language
Technical Term Familiarity	Technical terms similar in military & civilian jobs
Emphasized Skills	Team building and discipline
Verbal vs. Written	Easier communicating verbally than in writing

Leadership Impact on Transition Readiness

Table 24 provides insights into participants' perceptions of the influence military leadership had on their employment transition preparations, both within and outside the DoD TAP framework. The responses are categorized based on common themes derived from the survey answers.

Table 24. Impact of Military Leadership Job Transition Preparation (n = 6)

Impact of Military Leadership on Transition	Description/Insights
Minimal Time or Preparation	Mentioned brief preparation periods and personal circumstances affecting decisions.
Not Helpful	Leadership focused on other priorities or had limited time post-deployment.
Adverse Effect	Leadership perceived DoD TAP as less essential, prioritizing other duties.
Neutral Impact	Mentioned 'Zero' impact.
Formality Emphasis	Advised to be formal and professional during interviews.
Varied Leadership Support	Experiences of both supportive and unsupportive leaders during transition.

Survey and Real-World Branch of Service Distribution

Figure 18 is designed to evaluate the representativeness of the sample in this study against the service branch distribution reported by the Veterans Administration for the year 2022. The study aimed to align its participant distribution with these reported percentages: 47% from the Army, 23% from the Navy, 12% from the Marines, and 19% from the Air Force (Office of Policy and Planning, 2010). By comparing the actual distribution of study participants to these target percentages, the table assesses the success in achieving a representative sample.

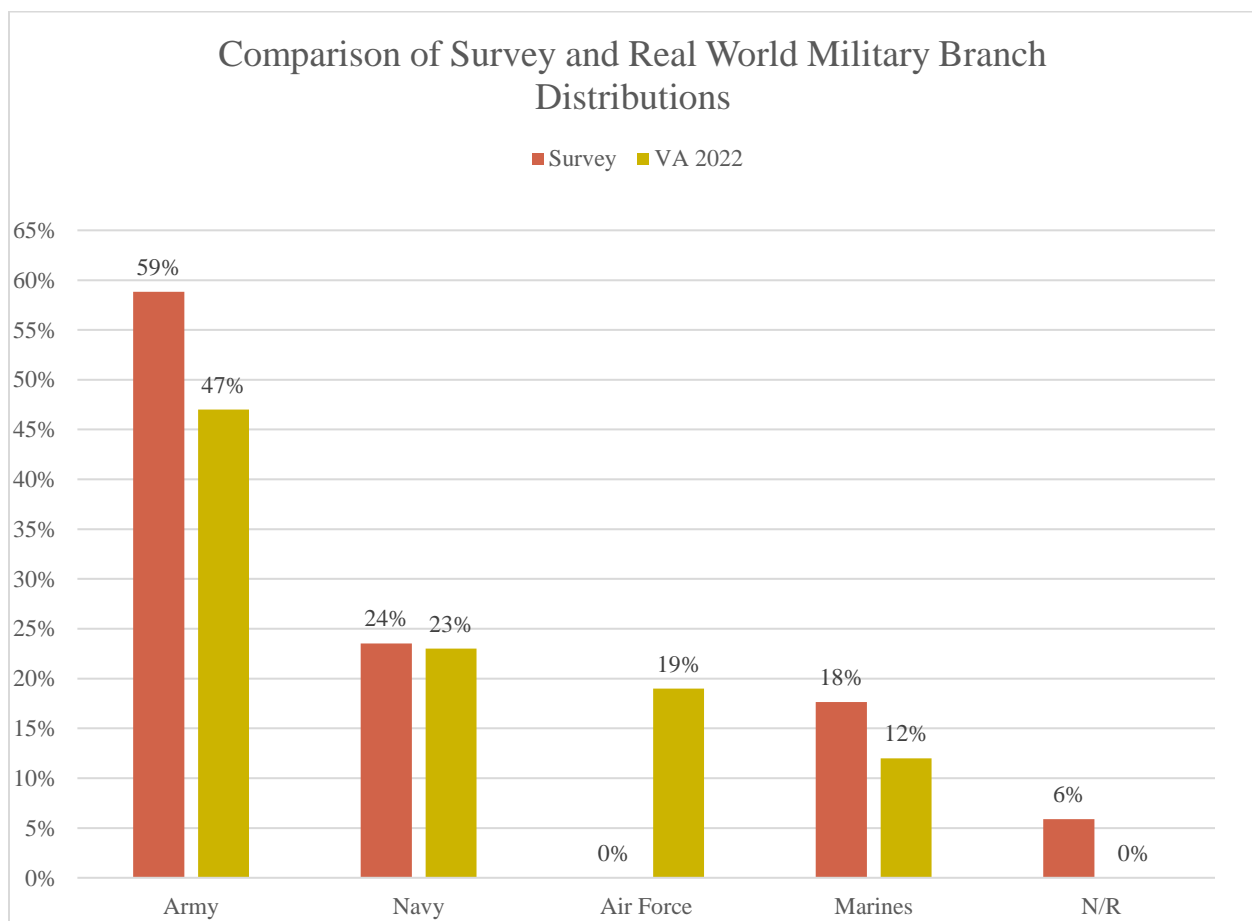


Figure 18. Comparison of Survey and Real-World Military Branch Distributions (n = 18)

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, human needs are organized in a hierarchical structure, with physiological needs being the most basic and self-actualization needs at the highest level. Needs are defined as "conditions or states that are necessary for the physical, psychological, or social well-being of an individual or group" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2021b). In contrast, expectations are "a strong belief that something will happen or be the case in the future" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2021a).

Meeting someone's needs involves fulfilling their basic requirements for survival and well-being, such as food, water, shelter, safety, and belongingness. According to Maslow's hierarchy, these needs must be met before higher-level needs, such as self-esteem and self-actualization, can be fulfilled. Needs are non-negotiable and essential for an individual's survival and well-being.

In contrast, meeting someone's expectations involves meeting the standards or goals that a person has set for a particular situation or outcome. Expectations can be based on past experiences, social norms, or personal preferences. Meeting someone's expectations can lead to satisfaction and positive feelings towards a product, service, or experience, while failing to meet expectations can lead to disappointment and negative feelings.

In conclusion, the key difference between meeting someone's needs and meeting someone's expectations is that needs are essential and non-negotiable, while expectations are subjective and can vary from person to person. Meeting someone's needs is a fundamental requirement for their well-being and survival, while meeting someone's expectations is about fulfilling their desires and preferences based on their past experiences or social norms.

Introduction

Chapter 5 delves into the intricate interplay between the fundamental needs and dynamic expectations of Veterans as they navigate the transition from military to civilian life. Rooted in the framework of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, this chapter underscores the hierarchical arrangement of human needs, ranging from basic physiological necessities to the pinnacle of self-actualization (Gepp, 2022; *Maslow's Hierarchy of Basic Needs*, 2011).

Chapter 4 meticulously presented the empirical data gathered from Veterans regarding their experiences with the Transition Assistance Program. In contrast, this chapter embarks on an interpretative journey to glean insights from these findings. It scrutinizes the extent to which the program aligns with Veterans' fundamental needs and accommodates their diverse expectations, all the while offering overarching implications for policy and practice.

In essence, this chapter underscores the crucial distinction between the immovable bedrock of needs and the ever-fluid landscape of expectations. This differentiation is pivotal in assessing the efficacy of the Transition Assistance Program and formulating actionable recommendations, which will be explored in subsequent sections. By delving into this nuanced interplay, the aim is to provide valuable insights for graduate students delving into Veterans' issues and inform military and civilian policymakers charged with shaping the future of transition programs.

Discussion

Research Questions

Veterans' Initial Expectations of Transition Assistance

Entering the Transition Assistance Program, Veterans harbored diverse expectations, often seeking a robust toolkit for civilian integration. A significant comment from the responses was, "I thought Transition Assistance Program would give me everything I needed to walk straight into a civilian role," highlighting an expectation for a seamless transition. This sentiment underscores a common desire for support tailored to individual backgrounds, contrasting with experiences of the program as more procedural than transformative.

Course Content Satisfaction

The content of Transition Assistance Program courses received mixed reviews from participants. "The skills translation was spot-on for me," remarked a Veteran from an IT background, applauding the program's technical acumen. However, this positive note was not universal, as others called for a customized approach with a Veteran expressing, "It felt too one-size-fits-all."

These disparate views suggest the need for the program to cater more closely to the varied experiences and expectations of service members.

Addressing Unmet Expectations

Veterans frequently voiced concerns about the lack of follow-up support, encapsulated by one Veteran's feedback: "After landing the job, I was left to my own devices." This indicates a pressing need for ongoing assistance with career development and cultural acclimatization, realms that fall outside the Transition Assistance Program's current focus but are essential for a truly successful transition.

Equipping Veterans for Civilian Life

Although the Transition Assistance Program provides foundational job-seeking tools, it seems to fall short in preparing Veterans for the intricate dynamics of civilian workplaces. A Veteran's statement, "I could write a resume, but navigating office politics was a mystery," vividly illustrates this gap. The demand for practical tools that aid in more than just securing a job but also in achieving successful long-term integration into civilian life was a recurrent theme in survey responses.

Most Beneficial Program Elements

Some aspects of the Transition Assistance Program, particularly those focused on networking and job application processes, were unanimously valued. A respondent highlighted, "The interview prep was invaluable," reflecting a consensus on the program's effectiveness in providing practical and immediately applicable skills for the job search process.

Recommendations for Program Improvement

While recognizing the merits of the Transition Assistance Program's current structure, Veterans also proposed improvements to bridge existing gaps. Suggestions for a tiered approach, responsive to different experience levels, were common. One Veteran aptly suggested, "A mentorship program would have made a world of difference," pointing to a need for sustained, personalized support through and beyond the transition phase.

Comprehensive Expectations for Transition Support

Veterans expected comprehensive support from the Transition Assistance Program, not just in employment assistance but in broader acclimatization to civilian work culture. This is encapsulated in a Veteran's response: "Getting a job is one thing; understanding the civilian work culture is another," highlighting a desire for a more all-encompassing approach to transition support.

Fulfilling Content Expectations

The Transition Assistance Program's content successfully met Veterans' expectations in certain technical areas, but a divide was apparent regarding the preparation for civilian workplace realities. "The military-to-civilian employment sessions were helpful, but didn't fully prepare me for the actual workplace," a Veteran noted, calling for a curriculum that provides a more nuanced understanding of civilian work culture.

Recognizing and Addressing Cultural Transition Needs

Veterans' responses highlight a significant underestimation of the challenges associated with cultural transition. "We need more than just job prep; we need life prep," a respondent stated, pinpointing a critical oversight in the Transition Assistance Program's structure that, if addressed, could significantly enhance the program's effectiveness.

Evaluating Transition Assistance Program's Effectiveness

The feedback underscores the Transition Assistance Program's role in offering foundational support but also its shortcomings in delivering a comprehensive transition experience. "The program checks the boxes but misses the personal touch," a Veteran articulated, reflecting a broader sentiment that calls for a more personalized, nuanced approach to transition support.

Identifying and Amplifying Beneficial Aspects

Job-seeking guidance, particularly for early career Veterans, was frequently commended. However, a respondent raised a concern: "The career translation was great starting out, but what about mid-career or senior folks?" This question underscores the necessity for the Transition Assistance

Program to develop differentiated pathways catering to the unique needs of Veterans at various career stages.

Extending and Deepening Post-Transition Support

Many Veterans articulated the need for ongoing support post-employment, a crucial aspect not currently embodied by the Transition Assistance Program. "Support shouldn't stop at employment; we need continued career guidance," summarized the widespread call for a more comprehensive, sustained support system that accompanies Veterans well into their civilian careers.

Additional Insights

Mental Health and Wellness Support

Survey responses underscored a critical gap in mental health and wellness support within the Transition Assistance Program. Veterans voiced a need for more comprehensive psychological services to assist with the often-stressful change from military to civilian life. The integration of mental health resources, such as counseling or stress management workshops, was suggested as a vital addition to the transition toolkit. Enhancing the Transition Assistance Program with these resources could provide a more supportive environment that acknowledges and addresses the mental well-being of transitioning service members.

Family Integration in Transition

The importance of family readiness emerged as a poignant theme among the feedback. Veterans stressed that the transition impacts the entire family unit, suggesting that the Transition Assistance Program could be more inclusive by incorporating family members into transition planning. Providing resources and training that also support spouses and children would not only aid the service member but ensure the family is prepared for the significant life changes that come with leaving the military.

From Employment to Career Development

Distinguishing between immediate employment and long-term career development, Veterans expressed a need for the Transition Assistance Program to extend its focus beyond just job attainment. Career progression and planning are areas where the program could offer more in-depth guidance, aligning with the aspirations of Veterans to not only secure a job but also to advance in a fulfilling career path. Tailoring resources to support both initial employment and subsequent career growth would significantly enhance the value of the Transition Assistance Program for service members.

Financial Planning and Management

The transition from military to civilian life brings with it a host of financial changes, and Veterans identified a gap in the Transition Assistance Program's financial planning and management training. More robust support in this area, including budgeting, investment education, and retirement planning, was seen as essential to a successful transition. Veterans indicated that improved financial readiness could lead to greater confidence and stability in their post-military lives.

Realistic Job Market Preparation

Several Veterans pointed out the need for the Transition Assistance Program to provide a more realistic understanding of the civilian job market. They suggested that the program should prepare them not just with the skills for job search but with knowledge on how to effectively navigate the complexities and fluctuations of the market. Emphasizing real-world job search strategies and current market trends would better equip Veterans for the economic realities they will face.

Regional Relevance of Transition Resources

The effectiveness of the Transition Assistance Program was noted to vary significantly by geographic region, as relayed by Veterans who experienced these inconsistencies firsthand. They advocated for a more localized approach to transition assistance, one that takes into account the specific job markets, resources, and community networks available in different areas.

Personalizing the Transition Assistance Program to address geographic differences could significantly improve its relevance and impact for transitioning service members.

Engagement with Veteran Communities

Building and maintaining connections with Veteran communities was highlighted as a critical factor for successful long-term transition. Veterans expressed a desire for the Transition Assistance Program to facilitate stronger links to these networks, which can provide ongoing support, mentorship, and camaraderie. Strengthening community engagement efforts within the Transition Assistance Program could lead to improved outcomes for Veterans as they adapt to civilian life.

Cultural Competency Training

Responses called for cultural competency training to prepare for a diverse civilian workplace, a dimension not fully addressed by the Transition Assistance Program. Such training would help Veterans navigate the various cultural nuances they may encounter, fostering a smoother integration into the civilian workforce. Providing tools to understand and adapt to diverse work environments could bridge a crucial gap in the current transition assistance curriculum.

Recognition of Military Experience in the Civilian Sector

The challenge of translating and validating military experience in the civilian job market was a concern among Veterans. They felt that the Transition Assistance Program could play a stronger role in advocating for the unique skills and perspectives that Veterans bring to the table. Enhancing employer awareness and appreciation for military experience through the Transition Assistance Program could open more doors for Veterans and ensure their skills are not overlooked or undervalued.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Key Points

Chapter 5 presents a multifaceted view of the Transition Assistance Program, illuminated by Veterans' experiences. It begins by capturing the diverse expectations Veterans hold as they

approach the Transition Assistance Program, highlighting a common desire for a program that offers more than procedural guidance, a longing for a transition that is as personalized and comprehensive as the training received at the onset of their military service. The analysis of the Transition Assistance Program's course content reveals mixed satisfaction, with technical skill translation earning praise, particularly from Veterans with specialized backgrounds, yet others express discontent with the program's generalized approach, suggesting a disconnect between the services provided and the nuanced needs of individual service members.

The discourse then shifts to the palpable gap between the program's end and the ongoing challenges of post-employment adjustment. Veterans voice a pressing need for continuous support, extending from job acquisition to sustained career development and cultural integration within civilian life, a facet currently underrepresented in the Transition Assistance Program's framework. Despite criticisms, the Transition Assistance Program's networking and resume-building workshops are consistently recognized as valuable, underscoring the program's strengths in equipping Veterans with tangible job-seeking tools.

The first half of this chapter concludes with a consolidation of the surveyed Veterans' insights, emphasizing a consensus that, while the Transition Assistance Program establishes a foundational base for employment transition, it necessitates expansion to adequately support Veterans in assimilating into civilian workplaces and society at large. The collective narrative suggests a pressing need for the evolution of the Transition Assistance Program into a more holistic support system, one that aligns with the complex and individualized journey of each Veteran transitioning back into civilian life.

Participant Recommendations

In response to the insights garnered from Veteran feedback on the Transition Assistance Program and additional survey findings, a cohesive set of recommendations is proposed to refine and expand the program's effectiveness.

Firstly, the program must offer personalized transition planning, using assessments to tailor support to individual needs, career stages, and aspirations, ensuring relevance across a broad spectrum of military experience. The establishment of an ongoing post-employment support

structure is crucial, possibly through alliances with Veterans' organizations and the private sector to provide sustained mentorship and career development.

Moreover, the introduction of cultural transition workshops is vital. These should focus on civilian workplace norms and the subtle, yet impactful differences Veterans will encounter, equipping them with practical tools for long-term success. Technological advancements should be embraced to create accessible, interactive training modules for remote or self-paced learning, catering to the unique circumstances of service members worldwide.

Continuous feedback mechanisms are necessary for program evolution, allowing for dynamic adjustment to the content and delivery of services based on direct participant input. Strategic partnerships with diverse industries will create direct pathways to employment, promoting the understanding of military skills in the civilian sector and easing the transition into various job markets.

Through these focused enhancements, the Transition Assistance Program can significantly improve its service, addressing not just the initial employment but also the continued integration and success of Veterans in civilian life.

Technology Recommendations

Following the analytical insights from Chapter 4 and the ensuing discussion, this section presents a series of targeted technology recommendations intended to refine the Transition Assistance Program and offer substantial support to Veterans transitioning to civilian life. These recommendations are prioritized based on their potential impact, the urgency of need as expressed by Veterans, and their feasibility, considering current technological advancements and resource allocations. Each suggestion is supported by a combination of survey results, existing literature, and case studies that underscore the benefits and successful applications of similar technological interventions.

Real-Time Skill Assessment Tools

The implementation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) driven real-time skill assessment tools is advocated to provide Veterans with instantaneous, personalized feedback, and actionable steps for

skill enhancement. Grounded in the survey feedback indicating a need for personalized skill development, these tools would utilize AI algorithms to evaluate Veterans' performance in training modules, identifying gaps, and recommending resources to improve proficiency. To safeguard privacy and ensure effectiveness, a preliminary pilot program, accompanied by a comprehensive data protection framework, should precede full-scale deployment.

Resource Navigation Apps

To streamline Veterans' access to educational benefits, certification opportunities, and professional networking events, the development of user-friendly resource navigation applications is recommended. These apps would serve as centralized platforms, informed by user data and preferences, to guide Veterans toward resources that align with their individual career trajectories, mitigating the information overload often reported in feedback. Prior to launch, these apps should undergo usability testing with diverse Veteran groups to ensure they meet the varied needs of the user base.

Communication and Social Integration Technologies

Leveraging the expressed need for stronger community ties post-service, the exploration and integration of technologies to bolster communication and social integration for Veterans are proposed. These would include digital forums and networking platforms specifically designed for Veterans, which facilitate connections with peers and industry professionals. The effectiveness of such platforms should be evaluated through initial small-scale, controlled social experiments aimed at fostering support networks and easing the transition into the civilian workforce.

Everyday Living Support Technologies

Recognizing the challenges Veterans face in daily life post-discharge, particularly in securing housing, healthcare, and managing well-being, it is proposed to investigate and deploy technologies geared toward these aspects. This would encompass applications offering navigational aids for housing options and healthcare services, and financial management tools, all adapted to the specific circumstances of Veterans. User-centered design principles should guide

the development, ensuring these tools are accessible and meet the diverse needs of the Veteran population.

Tracking and Progress Monitoring Technologies

Advancing the concept of self-managed transitions, it is essential to create and adopt progress tracking and goal-setting software tailored for Veterans. These digital tools, rooted in the survey findings that highlight the desire for autonomous transition management, should enable Veterans to set personalized goals, track milestones, and receive proactive suggestions for their career and personal development plans. To ensure these tools are grounded in real-world utility, they should be designed in collaboration with Veterans, incorporating their direct input to ensure functionality that truly supports their transition journey.

Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) Technologies

To address the often-stressful shift to civilian work environments, the application of Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) technologies is recommended to simulate various civilian job scenarios. This strategy follows survey responses emphasizing the need for practical, hands-on experience during the transition. Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality would provide immersive training environments, allowing Veterans to acquire and practice skills relevant to their future employment, with continuous updates reflecting the latest workplace technologies and practices.

Future Directions

The adaptation and continuous evolution of the Transition Assistance Program are crucial, especially considering the dynamic nature of technological advancements and Veterans' changing needs as identified in Chapter 4 and the earlier sections of Chapter 5. Future directions to enhance the Transition Assistance Program are guided by predictive trends, user feedback, and a commitment to technological innovation.

Advanced Data Analytics

Utilizing advanced data analytics is crucial for predicting Veterans' post-transition success and pinpointing those who may require additional mental health support. This proposal draws from survey responses that signaled the need for personalized support and proactive mental health resources. By evaluating engagement and responses to Transition Assistance Program offerings, predictive models could identify at-risk individuals, thereby enabling timely and individualized interventions.

Expanded Telehealth Solutions

The expansion of telehealth solutions, based on survey results showing a preference for accessible healthcare, is essential. This expansion should allow Veterans, regardless of their location, to access a wide range of healthcare services, with a focus on specialties like mental health. Telehealth solutions should also accommodate those with mobility challenges or those living in remote areas, ensuring equitable access to quality care.

Integration of Blockchain for Verification

Exploring blockchain technology will offer a secure, immutable verification system for Veterans' qualifications and professional development credentials. This initiative is in direct response to concerns about employment credibility post-service. By creating a tamper-proof ledger of Veterans' achievements, the blockchain would facilitate a seamless verification process for prospective employers and educational institutions.

Enhanced Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality Training

Enhancing Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality capabilities would cater to creating more lifelike and varied civilian workplace simulations. These simulations should allow Veterans to gain familiarity with a broader range of work environments, making their transition more comprehensive. Continuous improvement of these technologies would be based on the analysis of user engagement and feedback, ensuring relevance and effectiveness.

Personalized Career Path Algorithms

Developing sophisticated algorithms to guide career path decisions for Veterans would respond to the call for individualized career planning assistance identified in the surveys. These AI-driven systems would analyze personal preferences, skill sets, and market demands to recommend viable and satisfying career trajectories, thereby enhancing the transition process's success rate.

Collaboration with Industry Partners

Strengthening collaboration with industry partners would bridge the gap between military service and the civilian technology sector. This direction comes from survey insights that suggest the need for industry-specific preparation. Partnerships would lead to tailored training programs and job placements that directly respond to the needs of the technology market and Veterans' skill sets.

Veterans as Technology Innovators

Encouraging Veterans to engage as innovators in technology would capitalize on their unique perspectives and experiences. Initiatives like hackathons and research projects will allow Veterans to influence technological advancements actively. This approach addresses survey findings where Veterans expressed a desire to contribute meaningfully to society post-service.

Incorporate Veterans' Feedback

The continuous integration of feedback from Veterans into technology development is critical. Regular collection of insights through surveys and other feedback mechanisms will ensure that technology solutions remain responsive and relevant to Veterans' needs, as their firsthand experiences are instrumental in shaping effective support tools.

Accessibility and Inclusivity

Ensuring that technology solutions are universally accessible and inclusive is fundamental. Development should follow inclusive design principles, catering to Veterans with disabilities and diverse needs, fulfilling the requirement for comprehensive support systems as echoed in the survey data.

Policy and Legislative Support

Advocating for policy and legislative backing is vital to sustain and scale technology integration within Veteran support programs. Engagements with policymakers should aim to secure the necessary support and funding, reflecting the overall sentiment of survey participants regarding the importance of institutional backing for successful transitions.

Dissemination Plan

The dissemination strategy for the study's findings will involve several targeted steps to ensure maximum reach and impact among decision-makers in the military's Transition Assistance Program. The plan will commence with in-depth research into publications and forums that hold sway within the military and Veteran communities, followed by active engagement with Transition Assistance Program representatives to gain insights into their preferred sources of information.

After identifying key journals and publishers, efforts will focus on submitting articles to those with significant readership and influence among the target audience. To complement this, a comprehensive report and detailed infographics will be prepared, encapsulating the study's main insights in a format conducive to quick understanding and practical application.

Acknowledgment of the entities that contributed to the participant recruitment process will be approached on two fronts: a broad acknowledgment will cover untracked shares of the study, while entities with a known contribution will receive personalized communications along with a summary of the findings.

The strategy will be dynamic, open to incorporating collaborative writing opportunities with members of the Transition Assistance Program and other stakeholders. Although presentations and workshops are not a preferred method for the researcher, alternative methods such as digital dissemination through military and Veteran-focused social media groups and online forums will be utilized. Finally, the plan includes a feedback mechanism to measure the research's impact on the Transition Assistance Program and its decision-makers, which will also serve as a guide for refining future dissemination strategies. This comprehensive approach ensures that the study's findings are not only shared but also utilized in a manner that contributes to the continuous improvement of transition assistance for Veterans.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this dissertation represents a culmination of comprehensive research, critical analysis, and targeted recommendations poised to significantly enhance the Transition Assistance Program. The findings elucidate the complex interplay between Veterans' expectations and the current support structures, paving the way for transformative solutions that are deeply informed by technological innovation. The dissemination plan crafted in Chapter 5 is a testament to the dedication to ensuring that these insights reach and resonate with key stakeholders, driving policy and practice towards more effective support for Veterans. As the final word in this scholarly journey, it bridges academic inquiry with practical application, aspiring to leave a lasting imprint on the lives of those who have served their country, and now, with these insights and recommendations, can look forward to a transition into civilian life that is as seamless as it is empowered.

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APPENDIX A. REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE E-MAIL

Dear [Name]

Good morning! I hope things are well with you.

I am writing to request your assistance with a research study approved by Purdue University Institutional Review Board (IRB) IRB-2023-101. For this study I am conducting on Veteran opinions of the Transition Assistance Program. I understand that you know and work with many Veterans who may be interested in participating in this study.

The purpose of this study is to find out whether Veterans feel the Transition Assistance Program has met their needs and expectations. I believe that the insights gained from this study will help identify gaps between Transition Assistance Program courses and real-life experiences of civilian culture. To achieve this, I am seeking participants who are Veterans and have transitioned to civilian life after September 11, 2001.

I have created a recruitment letter that explains the purpose of the study and provides additional information on how to participate that is attached to this email. I would greatly appreciate it if you could share this letter with any Veterans that you know or work with who may be interested in participating. The survey is completely anonymous and should take no more than 20 minutes to complete.

Please let me know if you have any questions or need additional information. Thank you for your time and assistance.

Warmest regards,

Nanci P. Askew
naskew@purdue.edu
[Study Recruitment Letter.docx]

APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

(Hall, 2017): Qualitative Narrative Inquiry Research Study Protocol

A. Introduction to the Qualitative Narrative Inquiry Research Study

1. Objective:

The purpose of this current qualitative narrative inquiry research study is to gain an understanding of the shared lived experiences of military Veterans about career choices made while on active duty, along with family support, successful networking and job fit help prepare them for post-employment.

2. Theoretical Framework:

This qualitative narrative inquiry research study will contribute to the overall body of knowledge of understanding how the Person-Environment Fit (PE-Fit) theory explains the use of proactive behaviors, e.g., individual responsibility, family, and networking, and its role in helping military Veterans with their decision-making concerning post-military career transition. The PE-Fit theory is associated with the individual psychological needs along with the needs of the organization, e.g., skills and training to determine attraction and job satisfaction (Cable & Edwards, 2004).

3. The role of the protocol:

The current qualitative narrative inquiry research study will conduct open-ended question interviews with 10 military Veterans to gain an understanding about how the use of proactive behaviors prepared them for post-military employment. The structure of the open-ended questions will allow for the coding of key words obtained discovering emerging themes, as this will help provide contextual clarity and validity of the data.

B. Qualitative Narrative Inquiry Research Study Open-Ended Interview Questions

Interview Question #1: What does the transition assistance program mean to you, and did this program prepare you for post-military employment?

Interview Question #2: How was knowledge of financial options, such as 401k programs and other retirement investment programs; vision, dental, and other insurance programs; and other financial aspects unique to the non-federal workforce helpful information to help you transition from the military to civilian sector of society? Please explain.

Interview Question #3: Discuss the value, if any, of utilizing non-government transition programs or assets, e.g., Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Foreign Legion, Air Force Sergeants Association, professional transition agencies, to prepare for military transition?

Interview Question #4: What kind of informal or self-directed education (such as professional reading and research) did you pursue to prepare for post-employment?

Interview Question #5: If you are married and are the household's primary source of income, did you and your spouse discuss a potential change to the household's primary wage earner? If so, please explain.

Interview Question #6: Discuss the steps you took to successfully transition in your preferred geographic area?

Interview Question #7: Describe how you prepared yourself for post-military employment?

Interview Question #8: Who did you talk to for advice on transitioning from the military into post-employment? Discuss the guidance or ideas they provided to assist you with your transition from the military to civilian employment?

Interview Question #9: How has the use of social media, e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook, etc., for professional or social networking help prepare you for post-military employment? Please explain.

Additional interview questions:

AIQ4: What could the military service have done better or more to help create a smooth post-military retirement transition to a second career?

AIQ5: What insights have you gained from your career transition that might benefit others as they pursue their career transition?

AIQ6: Given your stage of transition, what additional thoughts come to mind about the relationship you see between your career transition and life satisfaction?"

APPENDIX C. SELECTION CRITERIA SURVEY

Selection Survey from Veterans Stories: A Narrative Inquiry Research Study Examination of Veterans Navigating Second Careers (Hall, 2017)

Selection Criteria Survey

Veterans Transition – A Narrative Inquiry Research Study

Military background:

1. What branch of service did you join and later transition from to obtain civilian job employment?
(Please check the appropriate block that applies):

- ☐ Air Force
- ☐ Army
- ☐ Navy
- ☐ Marines

2. What was your military occupation(s) while on active duty?

3. What was the length of your military service (expressed in year and months, e.g., 15 years, 2 months)? _____

Transition:

(Please check the appropriate block that applies)

When you transitioned from the military did you obtain employment?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

Participation:

I understand that my participation in this qualitative narrative inquiry research study is strictly voluntarily, and that I can opt out of this study at any time during my participation without fear of any physical or psychological harm.

(Please check the appropriate block that applies)

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

Many thanks for your participation, your contribution, and your time.

APPENDIX D. INTERVIEW QUESTION

Interview questions from Veterans Stories: A Narrative Inquiry Research Study Examination of Veterans Navigating Second Careers

RQ: How have individual responsibility, family involvement, and networking prepared military Veterans for post military employment? (p. 11)

Interview Question #1: What does the transition assistance program mean to you, and did this program prepare you for post-military employment?

Interview Question #2: How was knowledge of financial options, such as 401k programs and other retirement investment programs; vision, dental, and other insurance programs; and other financial aspects unique to the non-federal workforce helpful information to help you transition from the military to civilian sector of society? Please explain.

Interview Question #3: Discuss the value, if any, of utilizing non-government transition programs or assets, e.g., Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Foreign Legion, Air Force Sergeants Association, professional transition agencies, to prepare for military transition?

Interview Question #4: What kind of informal or self-directed education (such as professional reading and research) did you pursue to prepare for post-employment?

Interview Question #5: If you are married and are the household's primary source of income, did you and your spouse discuss a potential change to the household's primary wage earner? If so, please explain.

Interview Question #6: Discuss the steps you took to successfully transition in your preferred geographic area?

Interview Question #7: Describe how you prepared yourself for post-military employment?

Interview Question #8: Who did you talk to for advice on transitioning from the military into post-employment? Discuss the guidance or ideas they provided to assist you with your transition from the military to civilian employment?

Interview Question #9: How has the use of social media, e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook, etc., for professional or social networking help prepare you for post-military employment? Please explain. (pp. 89-90)

Additional interview questions:

AIQ4: What could the military service have done better or more to help create a smooth post-military retirement transition to a second career?

AIQ5: What insights have you gained from your career transition that might benefit others as they pursue their career transition?

AIQ6: Given your stage of transition, what additional thoughts come to mind about the relationship you see between your career transition and life satisfaction? (Hall, 2017, pp. 177–178).

APPENDIX E. RESEARCH AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Research and Interview Questions from Transitioning Enlisted Military Veterans Seeking Civilian Employment's Validated Instrument (Hart, 2018)

Research Question: What challenges do enlisted military Veterans experience finding employment after the transition from active duty service to the civilian workforce?

Secondary research questions are:

- RQ 1. What are the perceptions of enlisted military Veterans of the redesigned DoD TAP, in terms of how DoD TAP helped or did not help in finding employment?
- RQ 2. What challenges do enlisted military Veterans experience after the transition in finding employment that matches the enlisted military Veterans' experience and skills gained while in the military?
- RQ 3. What challenges do enlisted military Veterans encounter in communicating military job skills on resumes and in interviews for civilian employment?
- RQ 4. What lived experiences do enlisted military Veterans have with leadership, before and during the transition, in respect to leadership supporting the DOD TAP, providing moral support, leadership advice and guidance to the enlisted military Veteran in finding civilian employment?
- RQ 5. What perceptions do enlisted military Veterans have of the effectiveness of the DoD TAP in preparing the enlisted military Veteran to find civilian employment by letting go of the old way in the military and embracing the civilian employment culture? (Hart, 2018, pp. 71–72)

Interview questions are:

- 1. Describe your transition experience prior to separation from active duty, what did you do to prepare for civilian employment?
- 2. Prior to separation from the military, did you do any pre-work to prepare for the transition to civilian employment such as job-seeking, resume building, researching interview tips, etc.?
- 3. Describe your experience with the DoD TAP and the services provided by the various facilitators that focused on transitioning to civilian employment?

4. How do you feel the Department of Defense Transition Assistance program (DoD TAP) helped you prepare for finding employment after separation from active duty?
5. Are there elements of the DoD TAP that you feel were ineffective, or could be improved that would have helped you find employment?
6. After separating from active duty did you seek a job that matched the experience and skills gained in the military, if so, what was your experience in finding this job?
7. What was your experience in translating the experience and skills gained in the military to a civilian resume?
8. What was your experience in communicating the experience and skills gained in the military to recruiters and hiring officials in interviews?
9. Based on your lived experiences, was DoD TAP effective in preparing you for civilian resume preparation, interview skills, and adjustment to the civilian culture?
10. Based on your lived experiences, what impact did military leadership have on your planning and preparation, as part of DoD TAP, or outside of DoD TAP, and your readiness to find employment and transition to the civilian workforce? (Hart, 2018, p. 142)

APPENDIX F. PROPOSED OPEN ENDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Proposed Open Ended Interview Questions.

1. “1. Describe your transition experience prior to separation from active duty, what did you do to prepare for civilian employment” (Hart, 2018, p. 142).
2. “3. Describe your experience with the DoD TAP and the services provided by the various facilitators that focused on transitioning to civilian employment” (Hart, 2018, p. 142).
3. “4. How do you feel the Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program (DoD TAP) helped you prepare for finding employment after separation from active duty” (Hart, 2018, p. 142)?
4. “5. Are there elements of the DoD TAP that you feel were ineffective, or could be improved that would have helped you find employment” (Hart, 2018, p. 142)?
5. “9. Based on your lived experiences, was DoD TAP effective in preparing you for civilian resume preparation, interview skills, and adjustment to the civilian culture” (Hart, 2018, p. 143)?
6. “10. Based on your lived experiences, what impact did military leadership have on your planning and preparation, as part of DoD TAP, or outside of DoD TAP, and your readiness to find employment and transition to the civilian workforce” (Hart, 2018, p. 143)?
7. “Interview Question #1: What does the transition assistance program mean to you, and did this program prepare you for post-military employment (Hall, 2017, p. 177)?
8. “Interview Question #8: Who did you talk to for advice on transitioning from the military into post-employment? Discuss the guidance or ideas they provided to assist you with your transition from the military to civilian employment” (Hall, 2017, p. 178).
9. “Interview Question #9: How has the use of social media, e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook, etc., for professional or social networking help prepare you for post-military employment” (Hall, 2017, p. 178)?
10. “AIQ4: What could the military service have done better or more to help create a smooth post-military retirement transition to a second career” (Hall, 2017, p. 178)?
11. “AIQ5: What insights have you gained from your career transition that might benefit others as they pursue their career transition” (Hall, 2017, p. 178)?
12. “AIQ6: Given your stage of transition, what additional thoughts come to mind about the relationship between your career transition and life satisfaction” (Hall, 2017, p. 178)

APPENDIX G. RECRUITMENT LETTER

We are conducting a study to investigate Veteran opinions of the Transition Assistance Program and would like to invite you to participate in my research. Purdue University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) have approved the study; IRB-2023-101. The criterion for eligibility as a participant is that Veterans have transitioned out of the United States military after 11 September 2001.

The study involves completing a brief online survey that takes approximately 20 minutes to complete. The survey includes questions asking for your opinion and experiences of the Transition Assistance Program. The survey is completely anonymous and confidential, and your responses will not be shared with anyone outside of the research team.

In addition to the survey, we are also offering the opportunity to participate in an optional interview. You are free to participate in either the online survey, the interview, or both. The choice is yours. The interview can take up to 90 minutes and will be conducted over the phone or by video conferencing, your preference. If you choose to participate in the interview, you will have the opportunity to provide more detailed responses to the questions from the survey.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw at any time without penalty. There are no foreseeable risks or benefits associated with participating in this study.

If you are interested in participating, please use the link below to access the survey.

https://purdue.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_51Rci8tuFGgu1tI

If you are interested in participating in the optional interview, please send an e-mail to naskew@purdue.edu.

Thank you for considering our invitation to participate in this study. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact Nanci at naskew@purdue.edu.

Sincerely,

Nanci P. Askew

APPENDIX H. RECRUITMENT FLYER



Purdue University doctorate student is seeking Veteran's opinions about their experience of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP)



Scan the QR Code or use the link below to fill out the survey
https://purdue.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_51Rci8tuFGgu1tlt

Please submit your opinion by 31 Oct 2023 if interested

APPENDIX I. ONLINE SURVEY

Online Survey

Q41

Please take time to review this information carefully. This is a research study approved by Purdue University Institutional Review Board (IRB) IRB-2023-101. Your participation in this study is voluntary which means that you may choose not to participate at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may ask questions to the researchers about the study whenever you would like. If you decide to take part in the study, completing this survey is providing informed consent to participate in the study.

This study is designed to find out if Veterans (you) think the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) has met your needs and expectations and better understand why some military Veterans are having problems transitioning to civilian life after separating from the service.

You have been asked to participate in this study because as a Veteran who transitioned out of the United States military your opinion of the Transition Assistance Program is important.

The data collected in this study will be compared and contrasted against interviews that will be conducted to draw conclusions about whether Veterans think the Transition Assistance Program met their needs and expectations. Breach of confidentiality is always a risk with data, but will take precautions to minimize this risk. Purdue protocol will be followed for data storage. Data files will be protected in a secure cloud content management platform on Box.com where only Dr. Anne Lucietto and Nanci Askew will have access.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns about this research project, you can contact either Nanci Askew at naskew@purdue.edu or Dr. Anne Lucietto at alucietto@purdue.edu.

To report anonymously via Purdue's Hotline see www.purdue.edu/hotline.

You do not have to participate in this research project. If you agree to participate, you may withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. If you decide not to participate, you can exit this survey without completing it.

By selecting 'Yes' below you understand that you are providing informed consent to participate in the study and that you are a United States Veteran who transitioned out the military after September 11, 2001.

Thank you for your time.

Yes

Q1

What branch of service did you join and later transition from to obtain civilian job employment?
(Please check the appropriate block that applies):

Air Force

Army

Navy

Marines

Q2

What was your military occupation(s) while on active duty?

Q3

What was the length of your military service (expressed in years and months, e.g., 15 years, 2 months)?

Q4

What month and year did you transition out of service (e.g., Jan. 2015, 01/2015, or 01-2015)

Q5

What is your age?

Q6

What is your gender?

Male

Female

Non-binary/third gender

Prefer not to say

Q7

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

High school/GED

Associate's Degree

Bachelor's Degree

Master's Degree

Doctorate/PhD

Q8

What is your approximate annual household income?

Q9

What is your race and/or ethnicity?

Black or African American

American Indian or Alaska Native

Asian

Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

White

Q10

What is your marital status?

Single

Married

Divorced

Widow/Widower

Q11

Are you currently employed?

No

Yes

Q12

What is your zip code?

Q13

How many siblings do you have?

Q14

Where do you fall in the birth order?

Q15

Do you understand that your participation in this research study is strictly voluntary and that you can opt out of the study at any time without fear of retribution of any kind?

No

Yes

Q16

What does the transition assistance program mean to you, and did this program prepare you for post-military employment?

Q17

How was knowledge of financial options, such as 401K programs and other retirement investment programs; vision, dental, and other insurance programs; and other financial aspects unique to the non-federal workforce helpful information to help you transition from the military to civilian sector of society? Please explain.

Q18

Discuss the value, if any, of utilizing non-government transition programs or assets, e.g., Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Foreign Legion, Air Force Sergeants Association, professional transition agencies, to prepare for military transition?

Q19

What kind of informal or self-directed education (such as professional reading and research) did you pursue to prepare for post-employment?

Q20

If you are married and are the household's primary source of income, did you and your spouse discuss a potential change to the household's primary wage earner? If so, please explain.

Q21

Discuss the steps you took to successfully transition in your preferred geographic area?

Q22

Describe how you prepared yourself for post-military employment?

Q23

Who did you talk to for advice on transitioning from the military into post-employment? Discuss the guidance or ideas they provided to assist you with your transition from the military to civilian employment?

Q24

How has the use of social media, e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook, etc., for professional or social networking help prepare you for post-military employment? Please explain.

Q25

What could the military service have done better or more to help create a smooth post-military retirement transition to a second career?

Q26

What insights have you gained from your career transition that might benefit others as they pursue their career transition?

Q27

Given your stage of transition, what additional thoughts come to mind about the relationship you see between your career transition and life satisfaction?

Q28

Describe your transition experience prior to separation from active duty, what did you do to prepare for civilian employment?

Q29

Prior to separation from the military, did you do any pre-work to prepare for the transition to civilian employment such as job-seeking, resume building, researching interview tips, etc.?

Q30

Describe your experience with the DoD TAP and the services provided by the various facilitators that focused on transitioning to civilian employment?

Q31

How do you feel the Department of Defense Transition Assistance program (DoD TAP) helped you prepare for finding employment after separation from active duty?

Q32

Are there elements of the DoD TAP that you feel were ineffective, or could be improved that would have helped you find employment?

Q33

After separating from active duty did you seek a job that matched the experience and skills gained in the military, if so, what was your experience in finding this job?

Q34

What was your experience in translating the experience and skills gained in the military to a civilian resume?

Q35

What was your experience in communicating the experience and skills gained in the military to recruiters and hiring officials in interviews?

Q36

Based on your lived experiences, was DoD TAP effective in preparing you for civilian resume preparation, interview skills, and adjustment to the civilian culture?

Q37

Based on your lived experiences, what impact did military leadership have on your planning and preparation, as part of DoD TAP, or outside of DoD TAP, and your readiness to find employment and transition to the civilian workforce?

Q38

Do you feel the Transition Assistance Program met your needs ("conditions or states that are necessary for the physical, psychological, or social well-being of an individual or group")?

	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Unsure (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly disagree (5)
The Transition Assistance Program met my needs. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q39

Do you feel the Transition Assistance Program met your expectations (meeting the standards or goals that you have set for a particular situation or outcome)?

	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Unsure (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly disagree (5)
The Transition Assistance Program met my expectations (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

APPENDIX J. IRB APPROVAL



This Memo is Generated From the Purdue University Human Research Protection Program System, [Cayuse IRB](#).

Date: April 12, 2023

PI: ANNE LUCIETTO

Re: Initial - IRB-2023-101

A Review of United States Veteran Opinions of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP)

The Purdue University Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) has determined that the research project identified above qualifies as exempt from IRB review, under federal human subjects research regulations 45 CFR 46.104. The Category for this Exemption is listed below. Protocols exempted by the Purdue HRPP do not require regular renewal. However, the administrative check-in date is April 10, 2026. The IRB must be notified when this study is closed. If a study closure request has not been initiated by this date, the HRPP will request study status update for the record.

Specific notes related to your study are found below.

Decision: Exempt

Category: Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording). Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

Any modifications to the approved study must be submitted for review through [Cayuse IRB](#). All approval letters and study documents are located within the Study Details in [Cayuse IRB](#).

What are your responsibilities now, as you move forward with your research?

Document Retention: The PI is responsible for keeping all regulated documents, including IRB correspondence such as this letter, approved study documents, and signed consent forms for at least three (3) years following protocol closure for audit purposes. Documents regulated by HIPAA, such as Release Authorizations, must be maintained for six (6) years.

Site Permission: If your research is conducted at locations outside of Purdue University (such as schools, hospitals, or businesses), you must obtain written permission from all sites to recruit, consent, study, or observe participants. Generally, such permission comes in the form of a letter from the school superintendent, director, or manager. You must maintain a copy of this permission with study records.

Training: All researchers collecting or analyzing data from this study must renew training in human subjects research via the CITI Program (www.citiprogram.org) every 4 years. New personnel must complete training and be added to the protocol before beginning research with human participants or their data.

Modifications: Change to any aspect of this protocol or research personnel must be approved by the IRB before implementation, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects or others. In such situations, the IRB should still be notified immediately.

Unanticipated Problems/Adverse Events: Unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others, serious adverse events, and noncompliance with the approved protocol must be reported to the IRB immediately through an incident report. When in doubt, consult with the HRPP/IRB.

Monitoring: The HRPP reminds researchers that this study is subject to monitoring at any time by Purdue's HRPP staff, Institutional Review Board, Post Approval Monitoring team, or authorized external entities. Timely cooperation with monitoring procedures is an expectation of IRB approval.

Change of Institutions: If the PI leaves Purdue, the study must be closed or the PI must be replaced on the study or transferred to a new IRB. Studies without a Purdue University PI will be closed.

Other Approvals: This Purdue IRB approval covers only regulations related to human subjects research protections (e.g. 45 CFR 46). This determination does not constitute approval from any other Purdue campus departments, research sites, or outside agencies. The Principal Investigator and all researchers are required to affirm that the research meets all applicable local/state/ federal laws and university policies that may apply.

If you have questions about this determination or your responsibilities when conducting human subjects research on this project or any other, please do not hesitate to contact Purdue's HRPP at irb@purdue.edu or 765-494-5942, or use our [online form](#) to request an appointment. We are here to help!

Sincerely,

Purdue University Human Research Protection Program/ Institutional Review Board
Login to [Cayuse IRB](#)

See Purdue HRPP/IRB Measures in Response to COVID-19 at www.irb.purdue.edu