

AN ANALYSIS OF THE UTILIZATION AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MILITARY
TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AMONG VETERANS WHO SEPARATED
FROM THE MILITARY AFTER 1989

By

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

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Abstract

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This study is designed to investigate the disconnect between the intended outcomes of a military transition assistance program, and its implementation and effectiveness for a veterans transition experience. The research method for this study included focus group interviews which were conducted at various non profit veteran assistance agencies in Southwest Washington. 29 participants were interviewed using a convenience sampling method. Responses from these interviews indicated that there are not only several areas where the transition assistance programs needed to address gaps in services, but that there are many more factors that attribute to a veterans transitioning process after they are discharged from the military such as: family and peer support, and mental or physical health diagnoses.

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SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

The Transition Assistance Program (TAP) was first implemented by the Department of Defense (DOD), the Department of Labor (DOL) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) in 1989, and was designed to address and reduce barriers associated with a veteran's transition process back into civilian society (Reserved, 2015). The importance of this research study is that it analyzes the perceived effectiveness from a veterans perspective of a military program specifically designed to reduce the difficulty of reintegrating into civilian life. The primary component of Military Transition Theory that is applied in this study addresses the transitioning process a service member experiences at the time of discharge from the military, and the effect that the TAP may have on this process.

According to the Chicagoland research study from 2016, "service members encounter a series of needs as they transition out of the military" (The McCormick Foundation, 2016, pg. 6). The circumstances affecting a service member's discharge status can greatly influence how well they retain the knowledge of TAP benefits. On one end of the spectrum there are the vets who have a planned date of retirement. They must receive TAP no later than 90 days prior to discharge and no earlier than 24 months prior to discharge (United States Navy Chief of Naval Operations, 2007). This requirement applies to any service member with a planned date of separation. On the other end, there are those such as the Reservists and Guardsmen that qualify for veteran's benefits, including transition services, due to their length or location of deployment but are not given at least 90 days' notice prior to their exit date to fulfill this time constraint (United States Navy Chief of Naval Operations, 2007). According to a 2005 article addressing

military reentry and reintegration, “Reservists and Guardsmen facing release from active duty and return home, often where there is no military healthcare available, may find themselves in a catch-22 situation: either remain on active duty, separated from family and loved-ones to address medical questions, or ignore these and return home sooner” (Doyle and Peterson, 2005, pg 367). This is an example of just one conflict regarding the receipt of TAP that our separating service men and women must face. Separating service members also have to cope with the civilian sector not necessarily understanding the sacrifice or dramatic shift in culture that comes with serving in the military, “significant among these [challenges] are the absence of national consensus and lack of validation of Soldiers’ efforts and return of Soldier’s individually from theater” (Doyle and Peterson, 2005, pg 363).

According to the Department of Labor, “An independent national evaluation of the program estimated that service members who had participated in TAP, on average, found their first post-military job three weeks sooner than those who did not participate in TAP” (U.S. Department of Labor -- Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) -- Fact Sheet 1", 2016, Pg. 1). The DOL does indicate that “... many veterans initially find it difficult to compete successfully in the labor market” and, “...the TAP program addresses many barriers to success and alleviates many employment related difficulties” (U.S. Department of Labor -- Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) -- Fact Sheet 1", 2016, Pg. 1).

These two statements indicate that even with the presence of employment specific training opportunities available during the TAP process, the employment related difficulties are still apparent enough that veterans are reporting this as a significant barrier to reintegration into civilian society. A possible explanation for the difficulties with post separation employment related difficulties is offered in the 2008 research study by Clemens & Milsom concerning

enlisted service members transitioning back into the workplace. They state that, “frequent relocation while serving in the U.S. military might make it difficult for military personnel to establish or to maintain civilian professional and social networks” (Clemens & Milsom, 2008, pg. 247). The DoD “provides service members with the skills-building training, services, resources and tools they need to meet the Career Readiness Standards (CRS)” (About DoD TAP, 2016, para. 6). According to the DoD TAP website, in order to provide these services, the commanding officers have a certain responsibility to make sure that service members complete the necessary components of TAP, educate the service members of the importance of TAP, and allow for adequate time to complete the required components of TAP, along with developing and maintaining both their Individual Development Plan and the Individual Transition Plan (About DoD TAP, 2016). These statements provide a possible source of where there could be a disconnect between a successful TAP experience, and where there are reported problems with reintegration especially regarding employment readiness.

According to the Pew Research Institute’s study from 2011 which includes pre and post 9/11 veterans, the policy which led to the implementation of TAP was designed to help all separating service members. Of those contacted in this research study, roughly 27% of veterans experienced difficulty transitioning, and of those veterans that served after September 11, 2001, this statistic rises to 44% (Pew Research Center, 2011). These statistics illustrate the dramatic need of adequately implemented transition services, especially among those who served after September 11, 2001.

Based on the small sample size of this research, there is a limit to generalizing the results onto a larger population size. This in mind, the research is attempting to provide clarity to existing research utilizing Military Transition Theory. The benefit of adding this study to the

existing pool of research is due to its qualitative nature which is better suited to uncover the reasons why TAP is effective or not. The questions being addressed in this research study are intended to address the possible contradictions and/or efficacy of the proposed and actual benefits of TAP according to the agencies that are charged with its implementation along with the viewpoint of veterans who have completed the program and have attempted to reintegrate into civilian society. The importance of continually reassessing implemented policy through research will allow for a better understanding of how to close existing gaps between the intent of a policy and the reality after implementation.

The questions raised in this research address certain aspects of all three phases that are brought forth in Military Transition Theory. According to this theory, the three phases of a veterans transitioning process include: approaching the military transition, managing the transition, and community and civilian transition support (Castro and Kintzle, 2016). TAP specifically, is implemented prior to discharge from the military which indicates that the primary application of Military Transition Theory to TAP addresses the first phase of approaching the transition. The first research question in this study is designed to address the approach of the transition process and asks, “are veterans actually receiving the transition assistance they are required to receive?” The second research question focus’ on aspects of both the first phase of approaching a military transition and the second phase of managing the transition when asking, “Is TAP being completed when, where and how it is most conducive to receive this training?” The third research question this study addresses the third phase of Military Transition Theory by asking, “Do veterans demonstrate an increased knowledge and ability to find the assistance they need for successfully reintegrating back into civilian society after completing TAP?”

This study attempts to uncover and analyze whether or not there is a disconnect between the benefits intended of the transition assistance programs, and the effectiveness they have on assisting veterans to successfully transition back into civilian society. To accomplish this, this research will be utilizing a single phase, qualitative methodology. This study will include focus group interviews using grounded theory as a method to form the theoretical approach. Due to the limited sample size, the ability to generalize the results to a national population would not be appropriate. Rather, this research is intended to further investigate the existing and limited number of studies that were conducted around the effects of a veteran's military transition experience, particularly focusing on how TAP plays a part in this experience and how Military Transition Theory can be used to predict important aspects of a veteran's reintegration into civilian society. Analyzing the first hand experiences of the veterans who participated in the focus groups may identify important factors, specifically concerning the implementation of TAP, that can further the understanding of a veteran's transition experience.

Military Transition Theory

This study is utilizing Military Transition Theory which states that there are many points during a service members military career that require a level of transitioning to occur. Some of these include: enlistment, deployments, frequent station changes, and discharge from the military (Castro and Kintzle, 2016). This model consists of three overlapping components that interact with each other to define this theory. The three components identify phases of transitioning from active duty service to reintegration into civilian society. Those include approaching the transition, managing the transition, and assessing the transition (Castro, Kintzle, and Hasson, 2014). This theory explains how the first phase is essential to the trajectory of the transition for the veteran, including factors such as the culture of the military, personal characteristics and the

nature of the transition (Castro, Kintzle, and Hasson, 2014). The second phase describes how the veteran's personal coping styles, attitudes and beliefs have an effect on how the transition is managed. This leads to the final phase which is the assessment of the transition. This is measured through 5 primary outcomes: work, general wellbeing, community, health, and family (Castro, Kintzle, and Hasson, 2014). Because all of the outcomes are interconnected, they all have an effect on each other. If there is a failure in one outcome the entire transition experience is not necessarily going to fail, but it can impact other outcomes (Castro, Kintzle, and Hasson, 2014). For example, if the veteran has a challenging time finding employment after discharge, that may impact the success of the family unit measurement which is based on how well the family adjusted to their new roles.

SECTION 2

BACKGROUND

During every American conflict there is an increase in funding and personnel to meet the added responsibilities of the US military (Doyle and Peterson, 2005). Once these conflicts are resolved, there is a reduction in forces to return to the non-war time budgets (Faurer, Rogers-Brodersen & Bailie, 2014). The requirement to provide transition counseling in 1989 began due to a congressional recognition that there would be an impending reduction in military forces (United States Department of Defense, 2004). From 1990-1995 military forces (including the Department of Homeland Security Coast Guard) were reduced by 25% (2,065,597 in 1990 to 1,540,865 in 1995) (United States Department of Defense, 2004). This translated into a need to provide transition services that would include (among others) counseling on skills transference, and knowledge of support services for veterans that are no longer active duty (Clemens & Milsom, 2008).

According to a New York Times article from 2012, the veterans that return home now have access to more policy and social supports available than any other era of returning military personnel. The increase in support networks is, in part, influenced due to the lack of support provided to the Vietnam veteran (Hsia, 2012). Although this appears to have influenced the call for policy to address this issue, the majority of the research indicates that the drawdown from the Cold War was the primary reason to implement a policy addressing veteran's transition (Faurer, Rogers-Brodersen & Bailie, 2014).

One of the requirements for military separation is to provide proof of completion of these trainings in the form of a DD 2648 form (see appendix A). Transition services may vary between

branches, but they all have to provide a basic level of services (Clemens & Milsom, 2008). These services are provided to all service members except for those individuals that separated from the military with a discharge of dishonorable. These individuals will not be included because in most cases they are not eligible for veteran's benefits (Szymendera, 2016). Some of the services provided include: job counseling, placement services, financial planning, skills transference, and task based services such as resume writing and development of interviewing skills (Clemens & Milsom, 2008). The TAP process model that the Coast Guard depicts is similar to most branches, though the time and duration or order of each step may differ (See Figure 1). Initially, a service member starts with Pre-separation Counseling, eBenefits Registration and Preparing the Individual Transitions Plan (ITP), moving their way through TAP to ultimately reach the verification process that they meet the readiness standards.



Figure 1: **Note:** Adapted from https://www.uscg.mil/worklife/tap_overview.asp. Copyright 2016 by U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

The DOD, DOL and DVA are required to ensure that these services are carried out. In order to accomplish this, all three agencies entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which specified each of their roles in the process. The Coast Guard did not implement TAP until 1994, and at that point the Department of Transportation (DOT) entered into a similar agreement with the VA and DOL (Bascetta, 2002). The DOL was specifically tasked with providing 3 day transition assistance workshops which covered resume writing skills and job training. Along with these, the DOL is required to address prevention of long term unemployment, and improving work retention. In 2001 the DOL spent approximately \$5 million to provide about 3,200 workshops (Bascetta, 2002). The VA was given the responsibility to provide information on veterans' benefits, including information on disability benefits. The VA is also responsible for providing more detailed information and assistance to those service members separating or retiring due to a disability (Bascetta, 2002).

The DD 2648 is comprised of a checklist of benefits and services that are available to the separating service member for which they may request additional counseling by checking 'yes' or 'no' (United States Government, 2011). All options that are checked 'yes' will be used to complete an ITP. Once the ITP is completed the service member is then referred to the additional services they feel are appropriate for their success in military separation and transition. The ITP attempts to identify and prepare the service member by identifying the needs and plans regarding: post transition and personal/family requirements, evaluation of military and civilian experience and training, and determining the post transition career path (United States Navy, 2012).

SECTION 3

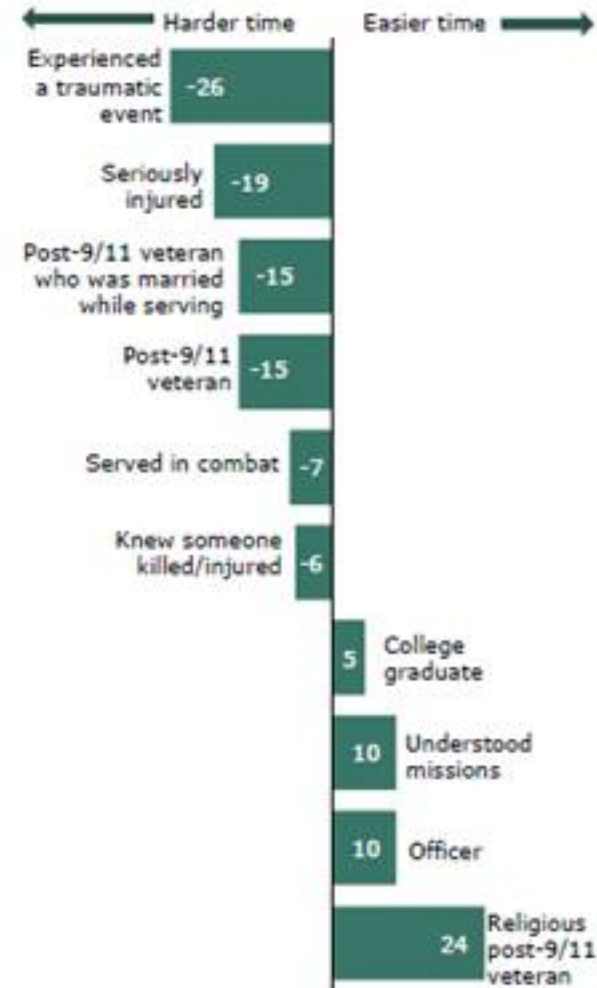
LITERATURE REVIEW

The Pew Research Center conducted a study that utilizes a logistic regression model which tries to measure the effect of a variable on a veteran's ability to transition out of the military into civilian culture (Pew Research Center, 2011). According to their research, the factors that can contribute to whether a service member that is exiting from the military will have a more difficult time with re-entry are whether or not: they experienced a traumatic event, sustained a traumatic brain injury (TBI), were a post 9/11 veteran, served in combat, or knew someone who was killed or injured (Pew Research Center, 2011).

These variables pinpoint personal, cultural and transitioning factors that are described in the first phase of Military Transition Theory. Factors that are less likely to be explained by Military Transition Theory and contribute to an easier re-entry experience, according to this study, were whether or not the veteran was a college graduate, understood their missions, were an officer, or were a religious post 9/11 veteran (See figure 2, Pew Research Center, 2011). The factors described in the first phase of military transition, refer to, "military discharge and combat history, personal characteristics (e.g., current physical and mental health), expectations and personal preparedness, and lastly factors describing the nature of the transition (e.g., predictable/unpredictable, positive/negative)" (Castro and Kintzle, 2016, para 4).

Factors that Predict an Easy or Hard Re-entry into Civilian Life

Percentage-point change in the likelihood that a veteran with each characteristic had an easy time re-entering civilian life



Notes: For percentages based on full sample of veterans, n=1,842; for post-9/11 veterans, n=710. Unless otherwise noted, subsequent charts are based on all veterans.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 2: (Pew Research Center)

r, 2011)

To try to determine the “perceived utility of the TAP”, a study was conducted by Faurer, Rogers-Brodersen & Bailie in 2014 and published in *The Journal of Business and Economics*

Research which surveyed 350 Army personnel who were discharged after the implementation of TAP. According to this survey, the number of years a service member had been in the military correlated to the level of favor the service member had towards the transition assistance (Faurer, Rogers-Brodersen & Bailie, 2014). This would indicate that veterans who are receiving TAP after the minimum amount of service required will not find transition services as beneficial as those who are, for example, retiring which requires a commitment of at least 20 years of service. These factors also support the first phase of Military Transition Theory, which describes elements of preparedness and expectations affecting the success of an individual's transition experience.

Shortly after the implementation of TAP, there was a study of 3000 veterans who transitioned from the military in 1992-1993 that were interviewed in 1994 about their annual earnings and their rating of preparedness for the job market. The results of this study showed that, "the more job research assistance a service member received and the more satisfied that they were with these services, correlated with their feelings of preparedness, and their increased success in the civilian labor market" (Faurer, Rogers-Brodersen & Bailie, 2014, pg. 57).

According to Landry, Lemak, and Hall in their 2011 article on successful program implementation, they list five major factors related to successful implementation: goal consensus, flexibility, cultural change, resources, and leadership (Landry, Lemak, & Hall, 2011). Consistent with this statement is a finding from a report published by the U.S. Department of Justice about successful program implementation which describes how, "programs are often thought of as a uniform set of elements that are provided to clients in a consistent manner; however, in fact, great variability exists in the manner in which programs are delivered" (Milhalic, Irwin, Fagan, Ballard, & Elliott, 2004, pg. 2). Military culture is very unique primarily

because of the specific framework to enter and exit the military, training specifically designed to ingrain the military culture and belief system into its members, along with an advancement structure that is strongly based on your ability to incorporate the military culture into a member's decision making process (Donnithorne, 2013). Based on these reports, the requirements for successful implementation of any program to be constructed within this culture will be challenged because of the stated lack in flexibility and culture change within the military structure.

One of the questions raised in this research is based on the apparent contradictions between the intention of the policy design and the actual success of TAP, and whether or not separating service members are actually receiving transition assistance. The relationship between the policy design and the effect TAP has on the transitioning experience of a veteran can be used to strengthen the transition assistance program to more adequately address the factors that contribute to a veterans transitioning process as they are defined through Military Transition Theory. To further illustrate the need to address this issue, research taken from the United States General Accounting Office based on data received by each military branch shows that in 2001, 81% of separating service members received separation counseling, and an average across all military branches (Air Force 64%, Army 33%, Marines 62%, Navy 78%, and Coast Guard 29%) 53% actually attended a transition workshop.

A collaborative study in 2016 conducted by the University of Chicago, Loyola University and the McCormick Foundation titled *The State of the American Veteran: The Chicagoland Veterans Study* uses Military Transition Theory and found similar data as the study by Faurer, Rogers-Brodersen & Bailie concerning the need for effective transition services prior to exiting the military (The McCormick Foundation, 2016). This study, along with another corresponding

study performed in Los Angeles corroborate that, "If government and communities want to get ahead of many of these military transition issues, much more attention will need to be placed on better preparing the separating service member for success" (The McCormick Foundation, 2016, pg. 39). More specifically, "Bringing awareness of separating service members joining local communities, and effective outreach efforts targeting family members, friends and employers of separating service members and veterans should be undertaken" (The McCormick Foundation, 2016, pg. 39). This study compared the transition experience of pre and post 9/11 veterans using a survey instrument, and supplementary focus group interviews of almost 1,300 veterans in the Chicago area. Consistently among the pre and post 9/11 veterans, this study found that the majority of those surveyed felt that their military experience had a positive impact on their lives (83% and 84% respectively). Furthermore, most pre and post 9/11 veterans feel that civilians do not understand the problems faced by veterans (66% and 69% respectively). This is explained in Military Transition Theory as having a strong base for transition trajectory for those of the reported majority that felt their military experience had a positive impact on their lives supporting the approach to transition.

Those that felt civilians do not understand the problems faced by veterans would be considered to have a negative component of the second phase of Military Transition Theory which includes the level of community support affecting the success of transition. What is even more pertinent to this author's study is that almost half of all the post 9/11 veterans surveyed report various feelings reflecting a lack of social connectivity after they are discharged (The McCormick Foundation, 2016) On a broader scale, the feelings indicating a lack of community engagement and support reflects the level of public and private organizations involvement along with funding for formal supports that are available for the separating service member.

A 2014 study was conducted in Los Angeles County, California that reflected similar findings. According to this study, more veterans reside in Los Angeles County than any other county in the United States. This study was also composed of both pre and post 9/11 veterans, and reported that, "over two-thirds of today's veterans [51% of which were post 9/11 veterans] reported difficulties adjusting to civilian life, and reported that they do not know where to go or who to contact to get help" (Castro, Kintzle, and Hasson, 2014, pg. 8). The greatest needs reported by post-9/11 veterans were employment assistance (65%), educational assistance (60%), VA service assistance (60%), health care assistance (56%) and mental health assistance (47%) (Castro, Kintzle, and Hasson, 2014). This study also found that at least 40% of veterans are exiting the military without having identified stable housing which indicates another possible gap in the implementation and the inability to utilize TAP. Another result discussed in this study concerns the significance of culture shock when reintegrating into civilian life. One reason offered to explain this difficulty to reintegrate was that veterans can have a feeling of superiority which translates to a veteran expecting civilians to accommodate them. Instead, veterans should have realized that they too are now civilians and they need to merge their military and civilian identities because an important aspect of a successful transition is forming civilian relationships. In addition to a veterans need to merge their identities and form those relationships, there is also the need for civilians to have a greater understanding of the challenges a veteran faces when they are reintegrating into civilian society.

Both the Chicagoland and the Los Angeles County study utilize Military Transition Theory to identify specific outcomes that can be used to evaluate the situations that their respective veteran populations are experiencing (The McCormick Foundation, 2016). These studies come to the conclusion that there is a great need for reintegration services for veterans to

successfully transition back into life as civilians. Both studies show a high prevalence of mental illness/ injury, and housing and employment insecurity. The Faurer, Rogers-Brodersen & Bailie study and The Pew Research Center both address the multiple variables that may contribute to a veteran's reintegration beyond the completion of TAP. Veterans are also reporting through these studies that they do not know how or where to get these services once they are separated from the military. In contradiction to this data, a study conducted in partnership with The Washington Post, and the Kaiser Family Foundation in 2014 highlighted some of the efforts that have been made by the United States government to specifically reduce the employment barriers that returning veterans have reported experiencing. According to this study, since 2009, there has been an increase in efforts to get veterans to go back to school, along with multiple campaigns during the Obama administration to promote hiring and training veterans (Flournoy, 2014). Specifically, "....setting a goal that by the end of 2015, all 50 states will have taken legislative or executive action to help veterans get the credentials they need to successfully join the civilian labor market" (Flournoy, 2014, pg. 2). Recommendations from this study include increasing the partnership between the government and private/ nonprofit agencies that support and employ veterans (Flournoy, 2014).

There is a large amount of academic research addressing the factors of a veterans transitioning experience at different points in their lives. Specifically, these studies address the experiences veterans have as they try to re-engage with academia or employment. Of those that apply a theoretical framework, there is one such study titled *Understanding Student Veterans in Transition* which uses Student Development Theory to better understand how veteran students have to incorporate every aspect of themselves into one functioning being which has now been influenced by the military culture. Student Development Theory is not a sufficient theory to

analyze TAP and its effectiveness and utilization because it only explores growth of a student specifically due to engaging in academia (Hutchinson & Mello, n.d.). In other studies researchers apply Schlossberg's Transition Theory. This theory states that a key component to understanding an event or nonevent as a transition is the perception of an individual that is experiencing it, because only the individual can perceive an event as a transitional experience or not. To try to understand a transition for an individual one must understand the type, context and impact it has on them (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Schlossberg's Transition Theory is incorporated into Military Transition Theory in how the third phase of determining the success of a veterans transition experience is through the measurement of specific outcomes, which is how Schlossberg's intent of understanding the type, context and impact of an event has on an individual.

SECTION 4

METHODOLOGY

Grounded theory consists of a general subject area that has concern for the researcher, which data is then collected on, and from this data a theory is formulated through a process of induction (Cho & Lee, 2014). For this research, a method from grounded theory will be borrowed in determining the theoretical framework for this research study. The subject matter of this study surrounds the utilization and effectiveness of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) that veterans are required to complete prior to separation from the military. The target population that this study is focusing on for data collection consists of all veterans who separated from the military after 1989, which is when TAP was first implemented for all branches with the exception of the Coast Guard (Neptum, 2012). Including only those who were eligible for veterans benefits will allow the data to only reflect the experiences of the veterans who would have been required to complete TAP before they were discharged from the military.

A qualitative research method was used in this study in the form of face to face focus group interviews. The questions that are included in the interviews are meant to evoke responses that reflect actual experiences which follow a realist approach (Cassell & Symon, 2004). This was chosen as the optimal method for this research because it allows a more holistic quality of data which can provide an increase in the understanding of veterans' experiences through the transition process (Cassell & Symon, 2004). An advantage to using a qualitative research method is that it allows the participant to reflect on their experiences and talk to an interested third party about concerns or opinions that they have on this particular subject (Cassell & Symon, 2004). Because of this opportunity to take in a lot of data from a participant, there is not only the

advantage of richer data, but also the risk of data overload (Cassell & Symon, 2004). These benefits were useful considering the smaller sample size of this study. This method also allows additional factors such as the interview setting to be incorporated into the results which is important due to the impact someone's environment can have on their mental and physical wellbeing.

These interviews were conducted over the period of approximately three weeks, and all participants were located in Southwest region of Washington State because this is the local region for the researcher and allows for increased access to participants due to their closer proximity. The participants that were interviewed were accessing services from, or working for local, non profit veteran service providers. These locations were selected because of a working relationship the researcher had with agency administrators, therefore reducing the barriers of accessing participants. In addition to the ease of access to the agencies, veteran service providers will have a much higher concentration of veterans compared to the civilian population which allows for the maximum sample size possible in the time that was available for data collection. Focus group sessions lasted between 3 minutes to 1.5 hours depending on multiple variables including group size and the participant's willingness and desire to share information. All of the data collection methods were approved by the Washington State University Institutional Review Board.

A veteran is defined as someone who "served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released there from under conditions other than dishonorable" (Moulta-Ali, 2014, pg. 1). A total number of 29 participants were asked to participate in this study. 1 opted out because of a stated emotional instability and 2 were not interested in participating. 26 total individuals participated or were involved in this study because this was the

maximum amount of participants that were available during the time period the researcher had access to the various agencies. Veterans that were targeted came from a variety of demographics with no control for gender, military branch, length of service, mental or physical health, or socioeconomic status. The participants remained completely anonymous and were given the option to refuse disclosing their names by adopting a pseudonym or not providing a name at all. There was no identifying information conveyed over the recording which prevented a future identification of an individual participant. After a group or individual had been identified a separate, private room was utilized to conduct the focus group sessions. These sessions were audio recorded with the permission of the participants and later transcribed for coding purposes.

The questions are open ended in style and the participant is given a copy of the questions for reference. These questions included: a veterans pre separation experiences with transition services, experience with post separation transition services, feeling toward their individual reintegration into civilian society, thoughts on how transition services can be improved, and an open question concluding the interview to add any relevant thoughts pertaining to transition services (See Appendix B for the interview guide). The development of the interview questions was guided by Cassell and Symons work on qualitative research methods. To formulate what questions should be included; the researcher depended on informal preliminary work including discussions with veterans and online research, along with personal experience and knowledge of the subject matter (Cassell & Symon, 2004).

A qualitative coding process was applied to the focus group transcriptions to identify the feelings and phrases around the quality or existence of transition services in an attempt to answer the above questions stated for this research (See the appendix C for the code book). An Open Coding Method (Saldaña, 2009) was used to identify themes in the text throughout each focus

group transcription. The purpose of Structural Coding is to start organizing the data around the specific research questions (Saldaña, 2009). In total, there were 15 preset codes that were identified prior to the data collection process. These were later narrowed down to 9 to eliminate redundancy or irrelevancy. The remaining emergent codes included 30 in number and they were later narrowed down to 14 to eliminate redundancy or irrelevancy. The codes used for this research included both preset codes and emergent codes. The preset codes were the anticipated categories of responses that the researcher anticipated would be present. Codes such as: “uninformed”, “no recollection of services”, or “fully reintegrated” (Saldaña, 2009).

With further analysis of the transcriptions there was a need to include emergent codes for the specific responses. Some of those include: “skills transference”, “follow up”, and “cookie cutter”. Most of the emergent codes were around the veterans expressed feelings during the transition process and suggestions for improvement within this program. These codes would have been much more difficult to accurately anticipate because the specific responses associated with these codes are describing some less common or specific instances reported by a fewer number of participants, and are not readily discussed in the literature reviewed for this research project.

Each coding instance will be recorded based upon an independent expression or description of a veteran’s transition experience. One participant may have several instances of “uninformed” recorded, but each of these instances occurred when the participant described a specific event that occurred during their transition experience. This will prevent an overrepresentation of a certain code within the target population. For example, if participant #1 described feeling like they did not know where to find employment resources after TAP, and did not feel that TAP provided information that was pertinent to where their base of exit from the

military was (TAP occurred in Florida, but they will discharge in Seattle) then they would have two responses that are coded as “uninformed”.

Based on the responses from the participants in this study, the findings of the focus group interviews shed a unique perspective on how the intended implementation of TAP hinder or is hindered by the realities of day to day military life. The response codes that were mentioned most frequently were regarding the feeling of being uninformed of necessary services after completing TAP (n=24), no recollection of transition services at all (n=15), the feelings of being to busy or forced through the TAP experience (n=15), and the need for some kind of personalization of services, whether it be an increase in the one on one transitioning assistance or counseling (n=12). The least prevalent occurrences of response codes were mostly describing why a veteran was unhappy with their transition experience or around recommendations for improvement in TAP. The remaining response codes had between 1 and 9 independent instances.

Once the focus group interviews were concluded, the researcher manually transcribed all of the audio recorded interviews to a password protected private laptop in order to convert the interviews to a document format. The recordings were then transferred to a separate external drive and securely stored to respect confidentiality. At this point, each transcription was reviewed to identify overall and specific expressions around the transitioning experience. Once the themes were identified, the frequency of each theme was determined by identifying how many times each coded expression appears in the text when describing a unique event or experience by the participant. Once the themes were identified, they were categorized as to which question being addressed in this research they are most appropriately answering. There was some overlap among the categorizations when they could be applied to more than one research question. An example of this is found in the code “Uninformed”. As shown in the code

book, this refers to when a “participant feels that they were not given the resources or information that they should have been given during TAP” (Appendix C). This could be applied to both the second and third research questions which address whether TAP was given where, when and how it is most conducive, and whether the participant feels that they have increased knowledge and ability to find the services they need after military separation.

SECTION 5

DISCUSSION

Research question #1. “Are veterans actually receiving the transition assistance they are required to receive?”

When addressing the first question in this research, there are apparent similarities between the results of this study and the data from United States General Accounting Office from 2001. The 2001 study shows that of the 81% of separating service member’s branch wide that were reported to have received separation services, only an average of 53% were reported to have attended a transition seminar. Similarly, the data in this study reflects that a total of 55% of service members interviewed have either no recollection (n=15) or only a vague recollection (n=4) of any transitions services before separation, whereas only 4 participant responses in this study had a clear recollection of services (see Figure 3).

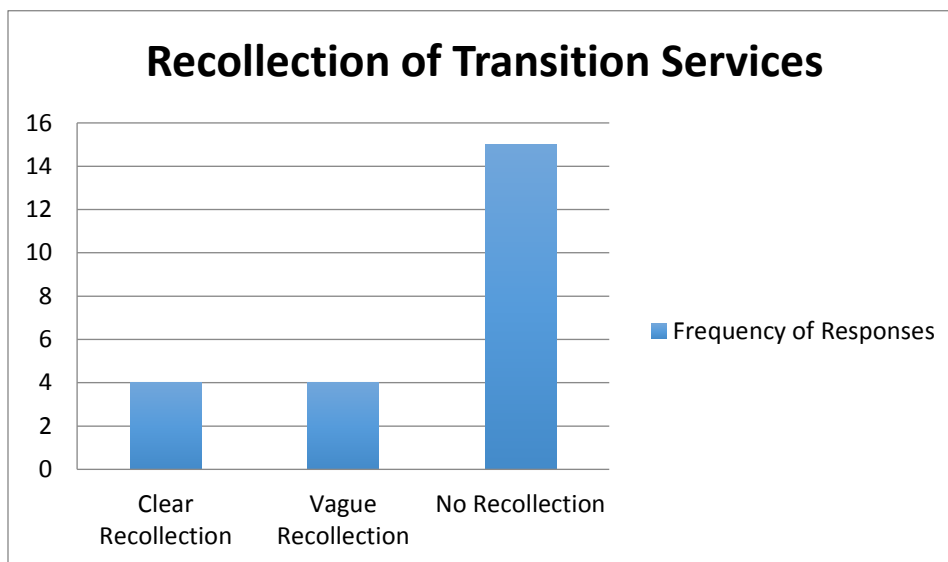


Figure 3: Recollection of Transition Services

What the similarity in this data indicates, is that consistently among both studies, veterans across all military branches report either not receiving, or do not remember receiving transitioning assistance. Along with these results, 8 of the responses of the focus group participants in this study reported that they were unsupported by the military. One example of a participant's response that was included in the code labeled unsupported was: “They just dumped me into the world. There is no follow ups, they didn’t help set up follow ups, there was no follow ups,” and, “.....and it's all because I didn't have a Veterans Affairs representative to go and talk to when I needed them, and not having that, it makes it difficult to make ends meet” (Anonymous Participant 15, 2016).

Instances of non-support and an inability to recollect services may be explained in several ways. One possibility is that the veteran simply did not receive transition assistance for any variety of reasons. Another possibility is that the veteran did not realize that what they did experience before separation was in fact, transition assistance. Finally, they may have forgot about it or blocked out the memory. There were several participants that described traumatic experiences which lead to their exit from the military. This could lead to a memory block of the receipt of services, whether intentional or not. A traumatic experience prior to exit from the military can affect the quality of a veteran’s memory which may lead to inaccurate recollections of their experiences at the time of discharge depending on when the traumatic experience occurred during their service time (Stark et al., 2015).

Some participants were experiencing the effects of untreated mental illness, which could also explain either a lack of memory or realization of completing transition assistance. There were several participants who presented as having a very clear memory about their service time and were also very clear about not having received any training, or briefings about transitioning

back into civilian society, employment skills, counseling, or anything described in the US Coast Guard model discussed earlier which indicates a breakdown between TAP theory and practice. Regardless of faulty memory or faulty practice, the responses to this portion of the focus group reflect that over half of our separating service members are not getting the appropriate transition services which incorporate the circumstances that a large proportion of active duty military personnel are experiencing prior to military separation.

There were participant responses indicating that there was some level of recollection of receiving transition services prior to their discharge from the military. Once responses were coded, 4 of the participant responses were coded as having a “clear recollection”, and 4 of the responses were coded as having a “vague recollection”. An example of a participant responding with a clear recollection of transition services is:

“Okay, there’s a minimum, there’s a one week class, that’s broken up into a one day, a three day, and a one day. First day was like a MOS transition where you find out what you did in the Army, or whatever service I guess, how to translate to civilian jobs. Then there was a three day department of labor workshop. It kind of gave you a brief rundown on what websites you can access, programs available, job hunting abilities, and it wound up with, or finalized with a resume and mock interviews, and the last day was the VA benefits” (Anonymous Participant 1, 2016).

An example of a participant responding with a vague recollection of transition services is, “Um, well it was a long time ago, but, uh. I don’t know....They had us go through some classes but that was about it. I suppose it was good I guess” (Anonymous Participant 2, 2016).

This total of 4 instances of veteran’s that have some level of recollection of transition services is

coming from a demographic of service member's that have separated as recently as a few months prior to these focus group interviews all the way to 1989, which is the first year TAP could have been received. It is important to consider the possible influence that some of these service members may not remember transition services due to the lapse of time between discharge and the focus group interviews, which could have been anywhere between a few months to 27 years ago. Given that this variable may decrease the likeliness of recollection, there are still a significant number of responses indicating a lack of recollection of any kind of transition assistance prior to discharge.

The responses that were coded as "to busy" were primarily regarding how time consuming TAP seemed to be for the focus group participant, and how their daily duties impeded the receipt of TAP which were reported in 15 responses. The descriptions of events that were coded as "to busy" are reflected in question number 2 which stated "Do you feel it could be made more effective somehow? How so?" (see appendix B) . These veterans specifically described separation experiences where they were expected to continue their regular military duties while simultaneously being required to attend all TAP briefings and seminars. For example, one participant recalled being assigned to duty that required them to be on ship for 24 hours straight. The participant stated, "I got scheduled for CQ [Charge of Quarters] halfway through ATAP [Army TAP], 24 hour duty, right in the middle of the week" (Anonymous Participant 3, 2016). The term Charge of Quarters describes when a service member is assigned to guard the entryway of the barracks for 24 hours straight. These experiences were common among those who expressed this response.

Research question #2. “Is TAP being completed when, where and how it is most conducive to receive this training?”

When discussing the question of how TAP is implemented, and whether or not it is conducive with the best time, place and method for a separating US service member, similar variables as those described in Military Transition Theory were expressed by the focus group participants. During the first phase of transitioning, Military Transition Theory describes four key factors that influence the direction that a veteran’s transition may go: military cultural factors, a veteran’s personal characteristics, the individual’s expectations and preparedness for transition and the nature of the actual transition (Castro and Kintzle, 2016). The 2014 study by Faurer, Rogers-Brodersen & Bailie concludes that the longer time someone spends in the military; the more satisfied they are with their transitioning experience. This indicates that, the amount of time a service member is engaged in military service is a more accurate predictor than the inclusion of TAP as to whether or not they will experience a successful transition. In the study conducted by this researcher, responses from focus group participants reflect additional variables in the implementation of TAP that may contribute to the quality of the transition experience. Some of these are that the employment resources’ training that was offered during TAP was geared only to the location of discharge, not the final destination of the veteran. An equal number of responses (n=5) also expressed there were not enough employment resources given to the veteran.

One example of this was illustrated by a veteran who was being educated about the oil industry in the South, but will be relocating immediately to the Pacific Northwest upon discharge. He was not able to apply most of this knowledge because it was not transferable to his

situation after discharge. This prevents the veteran from being able to effectively utilize the resources provided to them as they try to reintegrate into civilian society after discharge. These factors are directly related to phase two of the Military Transition Theory on how the management of the transition affects the success of the transitioning process. Also important in this phase of the theory are individual adjustment factors and community and civilian transition support which are not specifically addressed in the Faurer, Rogers-Brodersen & Bailie study. The results of the Faurer, Rogers-Brodersen & Bailie study in 2014 report that, “The more job research assistance a service member received and the more satisfied that they were with these services, correlated with their feelings of preparedness, and their increased success in the civilian labor market” (Faurer, Rogers-Brodersen & Bailie, 2014 pg. 57). This result reinforces the Military Transition Theory describing the importance of variables around a service members expectations and preparedness for transitioning out of the military it their effect on an individual’s transitioning experience.

Related to these participant responses are the feelings that were coded as “forced through” the TAP process. These feelings were expressed in a combination of the seemingly lack of priority of TAP services compared to regular military duties, and the apparent lack of understanding from command about the importance of TAP. One example of this statement is, “with the pressure we felt in the transition process, you probably see a mental health person somewhere and they check the box, but there is so much pressure just to get through it, you don’t want to talk about it and you don’t want deal with it then” (Anonymous Participant 4, 2016). When asked the question, “When and how do you think transition services would most effectively be delivered?” Responses included statements indicating that what is stated in the theoretical implementation of TAP, is desired by the participants and apparently not received or

retained. Some examples of these responses include: “Probably 90 days prior to ETS? At least inform these guys to let them know what’s available to them”, “.....they didn’t even tell me how to apply for my veterans benefits, it was, ‘here you go, have fun!’”, “Soon as I walked in, he stamped my paperwork and sent me out the door. Apparently he was supposed to help me start filing a claim there”, “....I think that should be at least a year before their date of separation”, “.....as soon as a veteran knew that they were leaving the service for whatever reason I would say prior to that's when the education training should be offered” (Anonymous Participants 2, 8, and 24, 2016). All of these statements are reported to be an integral part of the currently existing TAP program according to the description of the required components by the Department of Homeland Security. In addition, those veterans that have any level of recollection of their transition assistance experience have reported having received some or all of the services that are required for TAP.

Compared to the prevalence of the other coded responses in this study, a large percentage of those who participated in this study (n=24) had responses that indicated that they did not feel like they were given enough information to successfully reintegrate back into civilian society. This varied from feelings around being given inaccurate information about access to resources, to the volume of information being inadequate. Some examples of participant responses include: “I had no idea how to file service connected [disability claim], what it was what to, just no knowledge on it whatsoever”, and “I didn’t even know I was eligible for medical services until I came [to this agency]”. 5 responses from participants described that TAP was not offering enough information that was relevant to individual needs. They described TAP being too “cookie cutter”, and being unable to address their various personal experiences in the military that may lead to reintegration barriers after discharge.

Some instances of this response are: “I felt like they were misleading and generalized pretty much”, “.... it’s very enlisted based, granted they’re a larger proportion of the military service, that still doesn’t mean that officers don’t need assistance as well”, “I think a broader horizon for individuals who desire different careers than what’s expected of them” and finally, “Well the big thing that they said is it just don’t seem so cookie cutter. Everybody’s expected to go to the same, and not everybody’s gonna need the same level of transition benefits.” This indicates that if there was a specialization of transition assistance between those who are retiring, or have served at least 10 years in the military from those who have served less than ten years would allow for improved transition assistance for all separating service members. The research from the Pew Research Center corroborates this opinion when they reported that, “....the number of years a service member had been in the military correlated to the level of favor the service member had towards the transition assistance (Faurer, Rogers-Brodersen & Bailie, 2014). Specializing TAP beyond this level would be a difficult obstacle to overcome for a transition program, especially considering the immense potential for the variety of needs that could be present in each veteran.

The desire for some level of follow up after discharge was found in 3 responses. Participants in this study indicated that even a phone call around 6 months post discharge would have been extremely beneficial. Most participants that reported any level of successful reintegration happened month or years after their separation date. Among those, participants expressed that by this time, they had a better idea of their needs, and expressed having unanswered questions and the inability to find the answers (Anonymous, 2016). As stated in the 2016 Chicagoland study, "Bringing awareness of separating service members joining local communities, and effective outreach efforts targeting family members, friends and employers of

separating service members and veterans should be undertaken" (The McCormick Foundation, 2016, pg. 7). This effort is well beyond the level that this researcher is indicating, but it supports the idea that transition services shouldn't end when you walk off of the base.

Research question #3: "Do veterans demonstrate an increased knowledge and ability to find the assistance they need for successfully reintegrating back into civilian society after completing TAP?"

Utilizing Military Transition Theory, the third research question attempts to measure the utilization of TAP by exploring the outcomes of a veteran's transition experience using the participants stated ability to implement the knowledge they gained prior to military separation. According to both the 2014 California study and the 2016 Chicagoland study, veterans do not know how or where to get these services once they are separated from the military. The 2014 Los Angeles County study is similar to this research in how both studies are including both pre and post 9/11 veterans. It finds that, "over two-thirds of today's veterans [51% of which were post 9/11 veterans] reported difficulties adjusting to civilian life, and reported that they do not know where to go or who to contact to get help" (Castro, Kintzle, and Hasson, 2014, pg 46). This describes a huge disconnect between what the primary purpose of transition services, and what the veterans are actually able to take home with them. This disconnect was also noted in the 2016 Chicagoland study. Their research also indicated that "40% of veterans are exiting the military without having identified stable housing which indicates another possible gap in the implementation and the inability to utilize TAP" (The McCormick Foundation, 2016, pg. 7).

When applying the coded responses to research question number 3 which asks whether or

not veterans were able to demonstrate an increased knowledge and ability to find the assistance they need for successfully reintegrating back into civilian society after completing TAP, 24 responses from participant responses indicated that they separated from the military with the feeling that they were not adequately informed of available services for veterans in civilian society. In addition, 4 responses indicated that they lacked the ability to effectively transfer the job skills they acquired during their service into the civilian work sector.

An unanticipated finding was the percentage of responses indicating the level of integration a veteran feels they have achieved by the time of the focus group interviews. Based on the overall responses to the focus group questions, There are 6 responses for each of the three levels of reintegration that equal a total of 18 total responses. These levels of reintegration describe feeling fully reintegrated, somewhat reintegrated, and not reintegrated (see Figure 4). This implies that there are many more factors in the reintegration process than just a successful transition assistance program. One of these factors may be demonstrated in 6 responses expressing that they felt there was no public support after discharge.

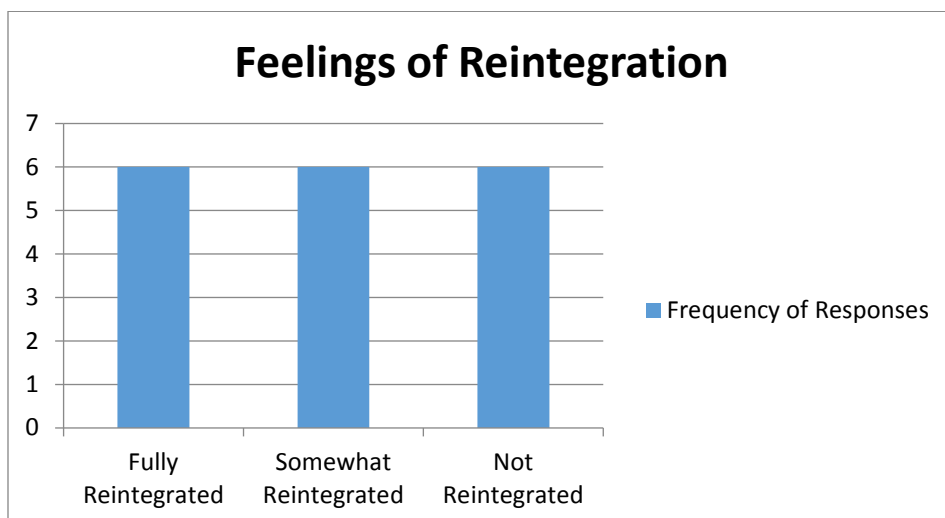


Figure 4: Feelings of Reintegration

There are three codes to categorize responses addressing a participant's feelings toward their reintegration which are: fully reintegrated, somewhat reintegrated, and not reintegrated. For the participants involved with this study, there were an equal number of responses for each code. According to research from Doyle and Peterson's research in 2005, Re-entry management in modern limited wars has been shouldered by society. "Following Korea, soldiers met indifference; following Vietnam, hostility" (Doyle and Peterson, 2005 pg. 363). This statement indicates that the era that a veteran served in is an important measurement for the success with transitioning back in to civilian society.

The controversy surrounding the Vietnam War caused a lot of negative feelings toward American involvement and the veterans who served during that war effort (Doyle and Peterson, 2005). An example from a focus group participant concerning reintegration and how civilian support has changed over time is, "I think that the general public does not understand the commitment that one needs to make to be in the military, and they don't, up until recently, they have not treated them honorably" (Anonymous, 2016). Community support is one of the integral parts in the transition management phase according to Military Transition Theory. The opinions of the general public towards the returning veterans can affect the amount of support services that are available, and the level of services for veterans will affect the transition experience of a service member (Castro and Kitzle, 2016) The 2014 Los Angeles study addresses this phenomenon with a different perspective. They found that one of the reasons veterans may have difficulty reintegrating back into civilian society could be correlated with the fact that "veterans can have a feeling of superiority which translates to a veteran expecting civilians to accommodate them. Instead, veterans should have realized that they too are now civilians and they need to merge their military and civilian identities because an important aspect of a

successful transition is forming civilian relationships” (Castro, Kintzle, and Hasson, 2014, pg. 8).

When asked about whether veterans feel they were supported after their military separation there were 7 responses that indicated the service member support. Of those 7 responses indicating support, the responses were divided into 2 different categories: those that attributed their support system to a friend or family member connecting them to services (n=5 - “peer supported”), and those who credit their support to a non VA or a not for profit entity (n=2 - “other support”). Considering the implication of another existing factor that affects a veteran’s transition and reintegration back into civilian society, the results of these responses indicate that peer support in some form or another has a tremendous impact for a successful reintegration.

In trying to answer question #3, the participants of this study indicate that they gained most of their valuable resources after they were discharged. And of those, they found their support system in the form of a peer or a not for profit which are often times run by veteran peers. Though this is not an encouraging outcome, this result does not seem to have a significant impact on a veteran’s reintegration. When considering the equal amount of responses measuring a veterans feeling of success about their reintegration into civilian society, this study indicates that TAP has less of an impact on a veteran’s actual transition experience than first assumed. This apparent lack of impact could be due to multiple variables. If the transition programs were implemented in a way that resulted in a better retention of available services after exit this could improve a veteran’s ability to access services, and therefore lead to an increase in veterans who feel that they have successfully reintegrated into civilian society after military separation. Another variable could be the significant effect of family and peer support, present in the management phase of Military Transition Theory that veterans in this study have indicated improved their reintegration process. Based on these veterans’ responses, there is a need for

both.

Military Transition Theory identifies specific aspects of a service member's transition that impact whether or not the transition will be measured as a success based on the third phase of this theory. TAP, if addressing all relevant personal, cultural, and transitional factors explained in this Military Transition Theory will create the base of the transition trajectory described by Castro and Kintzle. TAP is designed to address some of the personal characteristics such as, mental or physical well being of the separating service member by assisting with filing a disability claim or meeting with a mental health provider, it is not designed to address the cultural factors such as adapting TAP to suit an individual's discharge status, or combat history. Restructuring TAP to address the lack of veteran or even branch specific individualization, post separation follow up, or prioritization of TAP over regular duties would have a significant cost attached to it. Along with the cost, the internal training of commanding officers and other essential military personnel would be needed to address the importance of a comprehensive, supported TAP experience. Perhaps the most basic change that could be made which is supported in the second phase of Military Transition Theory is to implement a follow up conversation at a given point in time post separation. This would allow for resource guidance, and a chance for the veteran to address any challenges they may have faced since coming home that they may not have realized they would come across. Increasing support in this way would fill an existing gap during the management phase of transition which increases a veteran's chances of a successful transitioning experience.

Castro and Kintzle state that Military Transition Theory is a new theoretical framework that tries to "conceptualize how transition occurs, identify factors that promote or impede transition, or operationalize outcomes associated with transition success" (Castro and Kintzle,

2016, para. 3). Some factors that became apparent through the participants responses from the focus group interviews that are not adequately addressed in Military Transition Theory is the impact of family on the veterans transitioning process not just in the assessment and management stage, but also the impact on the approaching transition stage. Active duty service members that are married ranged from 69.9% of officers in 2014 to 52.1% of enlisted in the same year, and over all of the DoD personnel, 57.9% have children (ICF International, 2014). This means that over half of the service members experiencing transition out of the military are interacting with, providing for, and being impacted by the influence of their spouses and/or children between various times of deployment depending on military branch. In a book by The Institute of Medicine from 2013, they calculated that the average deployment time in months varied by branch from 4.89 months to 9.66 months (Air Force 4.89, Army 9.66, Marines 7.21, Navy 6, and Coast Guard 5.29 months) (Institute of Medicine (U.S.), 2013). While the average dwell times (times spent between deployments at a home base) vary between 22.46 months in the Army to 15.76 months for the Marines (Army 15.76, Coast Guard 15.76, Army 20.37, Air Force 21.95, and Navy 22.46 months) (Institute of Medicine (U.S.), 2013).

When a service member is preparing for transition, or entering into phase one of transition, the component described as personal characteristics in Military Transition Theory is needs to take into consideration more than “health, expectations and personal preparedness” (Castro and Kintzle, 2016, para. 3). Personal characteristics for those with families include the readiness and needs of their spouse or children, the culture shift that they will be experiencing not just as a family unit but individually, and the individual needs and desires of each person in the family as they are all uniquely affected by a parent transitioning out of the military. Unlike single service members, they are reintroduced into the family unit multiple times for months at a

time between deployments (Institute of Medicine (U.S.). 2013). Single service members are able to transition only taking into consideration the three components offered in Military Transition Theory: military culture, personal characteristics, and the nature of the transition (Castro and Kintzle, 2016).

TAP does address this factor of transitioning in the exit counseling (Bascetta, 2002). One component of TAP covers the common problems and offers some solutions around how the returning veteran can impact the family unit and offers resources for the family to utilize after discharge. (Bascetta, 2002).

If more concise conclusions and improvement are to be drawn around the implementation of TAP, it is imperative that additional variables are accounted for. Among those variables that future research could address is the importance of identifying more specific demographic information such as military branch, veteran age at discharge, length of time served, combat exposure, amount of external support systems available after discharge, gender, and the presence of any mental or physical disability.

SECTION 6

SUMMARY

Trying to understand the transitioning process for a veteran is a daunting task. There are numerous variables and every veteran is going to have a different experience. Some of the main factors are addressed using Military Transition Theory, but there still needs to be additional research to build on this theoretical framework. It is evident through these interviews, including controls for variables such as military branch and service longevity, or reason for exiting the military would be very beneficial. A major theme that has been brought to light in this research study is that when trying to decipher the challenges of transitioning from active duty military to civilian lifestyles their individual factors that come into play, but there is also the component of military culture, and as Military Transition Theory explains, personal characteristics also play an important role.

Knowing this, it is understandable why questions like those posed in this research are so difficult and rarely addressed. Brought to light in the focus group participant responses along with the studies addressed in this research, some returning veterans feel that civilians do not understand where they are coming from having been ingrained with military culture. Even though trying to discern the causes, and implement solutions for this conundrum are complicated, these difficulties augment the importance of studies like this one in order to bring to light possible solutions along with possibilities of future research which will ultimately serve this unique population of Americans.

The findings of this study are quite similar to aspects of the existing research around veteran transitions out of the military. Both the 2014 Los Angeles county study and the 2016

Chicagoland study found that veterans were not prepared for their reintegration into civilian life. Most struggled to find employment and were unaware of the services that were available to them or how to access them. The results in this research study also reflected similar findings with 5 responses indicated that the veteran did not receive adequate employment resources. With the frequency of responses being what is measured, an analysis that delves further into the individual experiences of a veterans transitioning experience can be explored. In addition, the research supports a more intimate understanding of where the possible gaps of TAP exist along with where veterans have or need additional support for a successful transition when applying Military Transition Theory. The three research questions posed in this study attempt to address and uncover these gaps based on what the participant's experiences with TAP were prior to their separation from the military.

The research questions formulated for this study are based on the desire to discover these gaps. Question #1, "Are veterans actually receiving the transition assistance they are required to receive," was designed to elicit findings that would address whether or not the participants received any form of transition assistance prior to discharge. These responses often came in the form of at least some recollection of services, like a class or a seminar that they were required to attend. Question #2, "Is TAP being completed when, where and how it is most conducive to receive this training," digs further into the issue of how TAP is implemented. This is a very important point to discuss based on the preliminary research and conversations with veterans that led to the creation of this study. There has been preliminary evidence prior to the inception of this research which implies that the implementation of TAP is not consistent in ways that would be vital to a successful retention or delivery of information. Question #3, "Do veterans demonstrate an increased knowledge and ability to find the assistance they need for successfully

reintegrating back into civilian society after completing TAP,” really defines the ultimate success of TAP for the participants in this research. Along with the consistent findings from other existing studies, there is a real opportunity to determine the effectiveness and usefulness of this program.

SECTION 7

FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Pew research study noted that an officer will have an easier time transitioning from the military than someone who only served the minimum requirement of time. In order to achieve the status of an officer, it can take various amounts of time dependent on which program is chosen, and the prior experience an active duty enlisted personnel has. On average, it is at least a four year degree in addition to a 9-17 week long training school ("Becoming a Military Officer", 2016). These results support the conclusion that one way to improve TAP would be to specialize the transition programs to the unique needs of those who have been active duty based on how long they have served. For example, those who serve 5 years or more would have a different TAP than those that served less than 5 years.

Another significant finding based on the responses from this research indicates that conducting TAP completely separate from where a service member is stationed (either in a physical space or separated from day to day assignments) would provide vital opportunity for a separating service member to completely immerse themselves in the complicated process of transitioning back to civilian culture. This would place an emphasis on the importance of transitioning successfully and allow the service member to maximize what they need to take away from this experience. This element of TAP ties in closely with the first phase of Military Transition Theory addressing the approach towards transition. Castro and Kintzle describe how the expectations and personal preparedness an individual has for transition is one of the three basic components that lay the groundwork for a successful transitioning experience (Castro and Kintzle, 2016).

Employment and accessing employment resources have been a common concern that has come up in not only this research, but in the other significant studies that have previously conducted (The McCormick Foundation, 2016). When referring specifically to the responses found here, a common theme was the lack of providing resources that are applicable to the participant's home region. Allowing the veteran to travel to his most local base immediately prior to discharge may alleviate this concern. Not only would the veteran be connected to employment resources that are appropriate for their region, this could also solve the problem of being assigned duties that interfere with TAP and therefore affect the retention of information. If one aspect of the problem is that commanding officers do not realize the significance of this training, there will need to be a slight culture shift of commanding military personnel who have been doing things a certain way for a very long time. Either way, this will cost our military more money, which is definitely a barrier in itself.

Further findings of this research indicate that there is a real need for follow up. Many responses have reflected the fact that once a service member walks off the base for the last time, you are left to navigate the system yourself. Those same participants felt that a basic follow up attempt at some point 3-9 months after discharge could resolve a lot of the issues around a lack of support from the military for separating service members. The participants of this study who felt strongly about this indicated that this call would be used to answer questions that the veteran did not realize they had until they experienced the difficulties that military transition inherently has. This call could simply be to make sure that the veteran knew where their local VA is along with any other local support agencies that served veterans. Again, this added aspect of a transition program would cost money. Another possible problem that was suggested by a focus group participant was that it may be difficult to contact a veteran having only their last known

contact information (Anonymous, 2016). Both of these barriers would hinder the effectiveness of this recommendation, but regardless, it is a moderate step that is simple to implement and easy to measure the effectiveness of.

Based on the results of this study, along with research done in preparation for this study, there could also be improvements made in Military Transition Theory itself. Pre military enlistment demographic factors have an impact a service member's reintegration success. This is not currently an acknowledged phase in Military Transition Theory. According to a study published by the Rand Corporation in 2006, when the United States adopted the All-Volunteer Force model it changed the demographics of those who joined the military. There was a higher prevalence of homelessness and mental health issues along with other barriers after discharge partially due to the fact that there was a higher prevalence of people with these same barriers joining the military, and once their service was over, they returned to the same lifestyle that they were in when they entered (Rand, 2016). By incorporating these factors, Military Transition Theory could identify more variables that effect a veterans reintegration success.

Another recommendation based on the findings of this study is to address the need for support a veteran may need after their separation date, which in one form, could be accomplished through peer support. This can come in the form of the family member who also experienced the hardship of transitioning from the military walking the veteran to the VA office to connect them with support systems. It may be seen in the veteran run organization that helps file claims and refers a veteran into the service partners that are appropriate for their needs. Incorporating these supports into the transition process could be vital for a separating service member.

Future research about a veteran's transition experience will be vital to creating lasting systems change in order to further identify the needs of a veteran and factors affecting their

transition experience. Because the participants in this research remained anonymous, some variables could not be accounted for therefore limiting the scope of this research study. More research needs to be conducted to specifically address the impact of a veteran's services experience on their reintegration to civilian life. Variable such as combat exposure, and the military branch of service could further expose the need for specific services or referrals that a veteran will need after discharge. The presence of mental or physical disability and its impact on a veteran's reintegration process along with their ability to take full advantage of the existing transition services would help to further identify needed supports for our service members.

Recommendations from other studies have suggested the only way to resolve these gaps in the transition assistance program could be to completely dismantle and overhaul it (The McCormick Foundation, 2016). Such a drastic action may not need to be taken to improve TAP. If measurements of success similar to those in Military Transition Theory were used to determine the success of a veteran's transition and recommended changes were applied, relatively moderate changes like incorporating follow up efforts along with re analyzing how to take advantage of existing support structures could go a long way towards supporting veterans in transitioning back into civilian culture.

The results of this research impact professionals who work with veterans as well. For service providers, counselors, and advocates, the indication from the results of this research are that these support systems are more important to a veteran's reintegration into civilian society than some people realize. Knowing what kind of experience an individual had as they exited the military would provide a more holistic approach to professionals in this field of veteran's assistance. For those individuals who deliver the different aspects of transition assistance, along with the government agencies that implement the policy, a drastic change will need to happen in

order to get the separating service members ready to reintegrate into civilian society. As stated in the literature used in this study, military culture is very different from civilian culture. For a successful transition to occur a service member cannot remain immersed in military culture while they are taught to live in another, there must be a separation of the two.

This research provides evidence for policy change as well. Policy around reducing the shock incurred when adapting from two different cultures isn't simple. Some of the suggestions that were proposed in this research would directly effect changes in public policy such as: physically conduct the training off base, along with softening the actual exit date so it isn't such an abrupt adjustment. Another change in this area of policy could be to alter those responsible for successfully implementing these programs away from military based government control and placing the responsibility with civilian agencies and organizations. It makes sense to use the resources of where you are going to help you get there rather than those from where you are leaving. The efforts to increase social support networks for veterans has dramatically increased in recent decades, and with further research and continued efforts, we can continue to serve those who served for us.

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APPENDIX A

PRESEPARATION COUNSELING CHECKLIST FOR ACTIVE COMPONENT (AC), ACTIVE GUARD RESERVE (AGR), ACTIVE RESERVE (AR), FULL TIME SUPPORT (FTS), AND RESERVE PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR (RPA) SERVICE MEMBERS <i>(Please read Privacy Act Statement and Instructions in Section III before completing this form.)</i>																																																											
SECTION I - PRIVACY ACT STATEMENT																																																											
<p>AUTHORITY: 10 U.S.C. 1142, <u>Preparation Counseling</u>; E.O. 9397, as amended (SSN).</p> <p>PRINCIPAL PURPOSE(S): To record <u>preparation</u> services and benefits requested by and provided to Service members; to identify <u>preparation</u> counseling areas of interest as a basis for development of an Individual Transition Plan (ITP). The signed <u>preparation</u> counseling checklist will be maintained in the Service member's official personnel file. Title 10, USC 1142, requires that not later than 90 days before the date of separation, for anticipated losses, <u>preparation</u> counseling for Service members be made available. For unanticipated losses, <u>preparation</u> counseling shall be made available as soon as possible.</p> <p>ROUTINE USE(S): None.</p> <p>DISCLOSURE: Disclosure of SSN is mandatory. Disclosure of other information in Section II is voluntary; however, it may not be possible to initiate <u>preparation</u> counseling and other transition assistance services or develop an Individual Transition Plan (ITP) for a Service member if the information is not provided.</p>																																																											
SECTION II - PERSONAL INFORMATION <i>(To be filled out by all applicants)</i>																																																											
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SECTION III - INSTRUCTIONS																																																											
<p>All transitioning Service members shall read these instructions before completing Sections IV, V, and VI of this form. After being counseled, Service member shall sign and date the form in items 28.a. and 28.b.</p> <p>This form will be used for Active Component (AC), Active Guard Reserve (AGR), Active Reserve (AR), Full Time Support (FTS), and Reserve Program Administrator (RPA) Service members.</p> <p>(1) Items checked "YES" indicate that you require additional information or referral to a subject matter expert on the installation or to an appropriate person in another agency or organization outside of DoD or attendance at a scheduled employment or VA session (Section IV).</p> <p>(2) Shaded areas on the form mean: (a) the information is not applicable (example: item 11.b. is shaded under "Spouse" because DD Form 2586, "Verification of Military Experience and Education - VMET", does not apply to spouses); or (b) the item is referring to a Web site address and URLs require no further explanation. URLs are provided so Service members can research information at their leisure on a given topic or subject.</p> <p>(3) Department of Labor TAP Employment Workshop: In accordance with DoDI 1332.35, AC, AGR, AR, FTS, and RPA separating and retiring Service members who check "YES" in item 11.a. on DD Form 2648, "Preparation Counseling Checklist", shall be released to complete the Department of Labor (DOL) Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Employment Workshop in its entirety. Service members will be exempt from normal duty the full 24 hour period of each DOL workshop day and the 12 hours immediately preceding and following the DOL workshop. In the event that a DOL Workshop is unavailable, the Service member will attend a military equivalent employment workshop conducted by the Military Services.</p> <p>(4) Veterans Benefits Briefing: In accordance with DoDI 1332.35, all separating and retiring Service members who check "YES" in item 19 shall be released to complete the Veterans Benefits Briefing sponsored and offered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in its entirety. Service members will be exempt from normal duty the full 24 hour period of each VA Benefits Briefing day and the 12 hours immediately preceding and following the VA Benefits Briefing.</p> <p>(5) Disabled Transition Assistance Program (DTAP): In accordance with DoDI 1332.35, all separating and retiring Service members who check "YES" in item 20 (with special emphasis on Wounded, Ill, or Injured) who have or think they have a service-connected disability, are awaiting a medical discharge, or have incurred an injury or illness while on active duty, or aggravated a pre-existing condition, and those referred to a Physical Evaluation Board or placed in a medical hold status by their Service, shall be released to complete the DTAP briefing sponsored by VA. Spouses/Family Member/Legal Guardian/Designee are encouraged to attend the DTAP briefing. Service members will be exempt from normal duty the full 24 hour period of each VA DTAP Briefing day and the 12 hours immediately preceding and following the VA DTAP Briefing.</p>																																																											

PREPARATION COUNSELING CHECKLIST FOR AC, AGR, AR, FTS, AND RPA SERVICE MEMBERS	NAME (Last, First, Middle Initial)		SSN	
SECTION IV				
Please indicate (by checking either YES or NO) whether you (or if accompanied by your spouse/family member/legal guardian/designee if applicable) desire additional counseling for the following benefits and services to which you may be entitled. All benefits and services checked YES should be used to develop your Individual Transition Plan (ITP). The following benefits and services available to all Service members, unless otherwise specified, will be explained by the Transition/Command Career Counselor.				
	SERVICE MEMBER		SPOUSE	
	YES	NO	YES	NO
	REFERRED TO			
10. EFFECTS OF A CAREER CHANGE				
11. EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE				
a. Do you want to attend the Department of Labor sponsored Transition Assistance Employment Workshops or Service sponsored Transition workshops/seminars?				
b. Verification of Military Experience and Training (VMET) (DD Form 2586). Do you want a copy of your VMET document? If yes, go to www.dmdc.osd.mil/vmet to print your VMET document and cover letter.				
c. Counselor will provide information on civilian occupations corresponding to Military occupations (see Occupational Information Network (O*NET website) at www.online.onetcenter.org/crosswalk and related assistance programs) and civilian occupations related to assistance programs.				
(1) Licensing, Certifications and Apprenticeship Information.				
(a) Department of Labor				
www.careeronestop.org/CREDENTIALING/CredentialingHome.asp				
(b) U.S. Army Credentialing On-line https://www.cool.army.mil				
(c) U.S. Military Apprenticeship Program				
https://usmap.cnet.navy.mil/usmapss				
(d) DANTES www.dantes.doded.mil/dantes_web/danteshome.asp				
(e) Navy Cool Website https://www.cool.navy.mil				
d. TurboTAP.org (www.TurboTAP.org) and other programs, tools, and resources				
(1) Employment Hub				
www.turboTAP.org/portal/transition/resources/Employment_Hub				
(2) Hire Vets First www.hirevetsfirst.dol.gov/				
(3) State Job Boards www.careeronestop.org/jobsearch/cos_jobsites.aspx				
(4) DOL REALifelines www.hirevetsfirst.dol.gov/realifelines/index.asp				
e. Public and Community Service Opportunities				
www.turboTAP.org/portal/transition/lifestyles/Employment/Public_and_Community_Service_PACS_Registry_Program				
f. Teacher and Teacher's Aide Opportunities/Troops to Teachers				
www.proudtoserveagain.com				
g. Federal Employment Opportunities				
(1) www.usajobs.opm.gov				
(2) www.go-defense.com				
(3) Information on Veterans Preference in Federal Employment				
(4) Information on Veterans Federal Procurement Opportunities				
(5) Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Special Hiring Authorities				
h. Hiring Preference in Non-Appropriated Fund (NAF) jobs (Eligible Involuntary Separates)				
i. State Employment Agencies				
(1) Career One Stop Centers				
www.careeronestop.org/jobsearch/cos_jobsites.aspx				
(2) Workforce Investment Act (WIA)				
j. Information concerning veterans small business ownership and entrepreneurship programs				
(1) Small Business Administration www.sba.gov/aboutsba/sbaprograms/ovbd/ and www.score.org SBA Patriot Express Loan				
(2) National Veteran's Business Development Corporation www.veteranscorp.org				
k. Information on employment and reemployment rights and obligations (USERRA) for Active Duty Service Members (Chapter 43, Title 38 U.S. Code)				
l. Information on "Priority of Service" for veterans in receipt of employment, training, and placement services provided under qualified job training programs of the Department of Labor				

PRESEPARATION COUNSELING CHECKLIST FOR AC, AGR, AR, FTS, AND RPA SERVICE MEMBERS	NAME (Last, First, Middle Initial)																				SSN						
SECTION IV (Continued)																				SERVICE MEMBER		SPOUSE		REFERRED TO			
																				YES	NO	YES	NO				
18. RESERVE AFFILIATION																											
19. Do you want to attend the Veterans Benefits Briefing? (See section III, Instructions, item 4.)																											
20. DISABLED VETERANS BENEFITS																											
a. Do you want to attend the Disabled Transition Assistance Program (DTAP) Briefing? See Section III - Instructions, item 5 and VA Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Service at www.vba.va.gov/bln/vre																											
b. VA Disability Benefits www.vba.va.gov/VBA/benefits/factsheets																											
c. Benefits Delivery at Discharge and Quick Start www.vba.va.gov/predischarge																											
21. STATE VETERANS BENEFITS																											
22. 2-YEAR COMMISSARY AND EXCHANGE PRIVILEGES (Eligible Involuntary Separates)																											
23. LEGAL ASSISTANCE																											
24. POST GOVERNMENT (MILITARY) SERVICE EMPLOYMENT RESTRICTION COUNSELING Information on post government (military) employment counseling (restrictions on employment, imposed by statute and regulation) shall be conducted by Services as appropriate. Transition/Command Career Counselors shall refer separating and retiring Service members to an installation legal office (Staff Judge Advocate or Counselor's Office) to ensure they receive a post government (military) employment restrictions briefing or counseling from an ethics official.																											
25. INDIVIDUAL TRANSITION PLAN (ITP)																											
a. As a separating Service member, after receiving <u>Preseparation</u> Counseling information and completing this checklist, you and your spouse/family member/legal guardian/designee (if applicable) are entitled to receive assistance in developing an Individual Transition Plan (ITP) based on the areas of interest you have identified on this checklist. The <u>Preseparation</u> Counseling Checklist addresses a variety of transition services and benefits to which you may be entitled. Each individual is strongly encouraged to take advantage of the opportunity to develop an ITP. The purpose of the ITP is to identify educational, training, and employment objectives and to develop a plan to help you achieve these objectives. It is the Military Department's responsibility to offer Service members the opportunity and assistance they need to develop an ITP. It is the Service member's responsibility to develop an ITP based on his/her specific objectives and the objectives of his or her spouse, if appropriate.																											
Based upon information received during <u>Preseparation</u> Counseling, do you and/or your spouse/family member/legal guardian/designee desire assistance in developing your ITP? If YES, the Transition staff/counselor/Command Career Counselor is available to assist you (see www.TurboTap.org website).																				SERVICE MEMBER		SPOUSE					
																				YES	NO	YES	NO				
b. To assist your transition counselor, choose the answer that best describes your post-military goal(s): (<i>X all that apply</i>)																											
<input type="checkbox"/> I already have post-military employment. <input type="checkbox"/> I plan to go to school and use my VA education benefits.																											
<input type="checkbox"/> I plan to get a job and start work as soon as possible. <input type="checkbox"/> I don't know what I plan to do.																											
Other (please describe/write in)																											
SECTION V - LANGUAGE SKILLS/REGIONAL EXPERTISE																											
Counselors will ensure all transitioning Service members, Active, Guard and Reserve with language skills and/or regional expertise complete Item 26.																											
26. The Department of Defense and other Federal agencies have placed a high level of importance on critical foreign language skills and regional expertise to meet emerging requirements during times of need, crisis, and/or national emergency. The Department of Defense and other Federal agencies may want to contact you in the future to determine if you would be willing to volunteer your services or to offer you potential employment that would take advantage of your language proficiency and/or regional expertise.																											
a. Do you consent to being contacted by the Department of Defense for such purposes?																				YES		NO					
b. Do you consent to having the Department of Defense share your information with other Federal agencies for such purposes?																				YES		NO					

PRESEPARATION COUNSELING CHECKLIST FOR AC, AGR, AR, FTS, AND RPA SERVICE MEMBERS	NAME <i>(Last, First, Middle Initial)</i> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 1.2em; width: 100%;"></div>	SSN <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 1.2em; width: 100%;"></div>
SECTION VI - REMARKS <i>(Attach additional pages if necessary)</i>		
Complete the following ONLY if you placed an X in Item 8.a. <i>(See page 1, Section II, item 8.a.)</i> 27. MY COUNSELING WAS CONDUCTED 89 DAYS OR LESS BEFORE MY SEPARATION OR RETIREMENT BECAUSE OF: <i>(X one)</i>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Mission requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Personal reasons <input type="checkbox"/> Medical separation/discharge	<input type="checkbox"/> Legal separation <input type="checkbox"/> Change in career decision <input type="checkbox"/> Other <i>(Please provide a brief explanation)</i>	
28. SERVICE MEMBER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT By signing and dating this form, you, the Service member, are acknowledging that you received <u>Preseparation</u> Counseling on the date below (item 28.b.), and that you understand the transition benefits and services available to assist you in your transition as required by Title 10, U.S.C., Chapter 58, Section 1142.		
a. SERVICE MEMBER SIGNATURE <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 1.2em; width: 100%;"></div>	b. DATE (YYYYMMDD) <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 1.2em; width: 100%;"></div>	c. TRANSITION COUNSELOR SIGNATURE <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 1.2em; width: 100%;"></div>
		d. DATE (YYYYMMDD) <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 1.2em; width: 100%;"></div>

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What was your experience with the pre-separation transition services offered by the military?
2. Do you feel it could be made more effective somehow? How so?
3. What is your experience with transition services offered to veterans after they are no longer considered active duty?
4. Do you consider yourself to have successfully reintegrated into civilian society? Why or Why not?
5. When and how do you think transition services would be most effectively delivered?
6. Is there anything that you feel is important and relevant to a service member's transitioning process that we have not covered in this conversation?

APPENDIX C

CODE BOOK

Pre-set codes

“Uninformed” - Participant feels that they were not given the resources or information that they should have been given in TAP including information on how to access the VA and VA benefits..

“No recollection of Services” - There is no recollection of transition services before or during military separation.

“Vague Recollection” - There is some recollection of services before or during separation, but not clearly or are confused by what they were.

“Clear Recollection” - Remembers clearly about receiving TAP.

“Somewhat reintegrated” - Participant expresses some level of reintegration into civilian life.

“Fully reintegrated” - Participant expresses they have successfully reintegrated.

“Not Reintegrated” - Participant does not feel reintegrated into civilian society.

“Unsatisfied” - After completing TAP the participant was unsatisfied with the services provided.

“Satisfaction” - Participant expresses some level of satisfaction with a portion of or all of TAP.

Emergent Codes:

“Other support” - Participant credits their transition to non VA or a Non Profit entity or person.

“Skills Transference” - Participant comments about the difficulty of skills transference from military to civilian.

“Start sooner” - Participant expresses that TAP should have begun sooner before the scheduled separation date.

“Soft ETS date” - Participant recommends allowing veterans to remain on base after separation to allow time to stabilize and obtain needed supports.

“Follow up” - Participant feels there should have been some level of post separation follow up.

“Personalization” - Participant feels that TAP should include more ‘one-on-one’ services, including an emphasis on mental health.

“Cookie Cutter” - Participant feels there should be more variance in services offered by TAP.

“Employment Resources” - Participant thinks that TAP needs to emphasize more on employment related services.

“Peer Supported” - They learned of basic veteran services, specifically through the VA, only because another veteran/peer informed them before or after separation.

“Unsupported” - Participation feels completely unsupported by the military.

“Out of Area” - TAP did not offer services pertinent to the veterans home base.

“No public support” - The participant feels that their transition was more difficult because of a lack of support from society.