



SURVEY ON TRANSITION TO CIVILIAN LIFE: REPORT ON THE HEALTH OF REGULAR FORCE VETERANS

What is this study about?

Military to civilian transition is an important but poorly researched event in the life course of military Veterans. The *Survey on Transition to Civilian Life* was a national telephone survey designed to explore how CF Veterans are doing after transition to civilian life in terms of health, disability, income, social supports and other factors that affect health. Statistics Canada conducted the survey on behalf of Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) and the Department of National Defence (DND).

What are the questions addressed by this study?

This survey is part of the Life After Services Studies which focus on four research questions:

1. How are CF personnel doing after transition to civilian life in terms of income, health (including well-being), disability, and other determinants of health?
2. Are existing transition-re-establishment programs reaching those in need?
3. Are there unmet needs that call for new or revised programs?
4. How do VAC clients and non-clients compare in terms of income, health (including well-being), disability and other determinants of health (factors that affect health)?

Why is this study important?

Findings will help VAC and DND understand how Veterans experience transition to civilian life and provide the evidence needed to determine how best to meet Veterans' needs.

Who participated in this study?

The survey participants were 3,154 Regular Force Veterans who released between 1998 and 2007. Veterans were grouped into three categories: (1) Veterans not receiving VAC benefits (non-clients); (2) Veterans participating in VAC's New Veterans Charter Programs (NVC clients); and (3) Veterans participating in VAC's Disability Pension Program (DP clients). About one-third of Veterans were receiving benefits from VAC.

What are the highlights of this study?

Population Characteristics: The overall population was mostly male, 46 years of age on average, and married or living common-law. About half served 20 years or more, and two-thirds had deployed at least once. The majority released as non-commissioned members, and about half (49%) released from the Army, 16% released from the Navy, and 31% released from the Air Force. Over half released voluntarily and one-quarter released for medical reasons. Compared to non-clients, VAC clients were older and more often served 20 years or more. They also more often served in the Army, released as a non-commissioned officer, and had less post-secondary education than non-clients. Compared to non-clients, VAC clients were more often deployed and more often released for medical reasons.



Health, Disability and Determinants of Health:

- Veterans had worse health, disability and determinants of health than the general Canadian population. The majority who reported chronic health conditions diagnosed by a health professional attributed their condition to military service, as did many with disability.
- Non-clients were similar to Canadians in the general population in many respects, but on average had higher rates of some chronic health conditions.
- VAC clients reported complex states of health. The great majority, more than 90% reported at least one physical health condition diagnosed by a health professional, and about half reported at least one mental health condition. Two-thirds had 4-6 physical and mental health conditions, and a fifth had even larger numbers of *comorbid conditions* (presence of two or more conditions in the same individual). Overall, 6% of Veterans reported having thoughts of suicide in the prior 12 months.
- Since persons seek assistance from VAC with health problems, it is not unexpected that VAC clients had more problems with health, more disability and access to determinants of health than the general population. NVC clients had the worst status.
- Rates of low income among Veterans were half that of the Canadian general population. Low income rates were similar for non-clients and clients. Overall, most were satisfied with their current financial situation with NVC clients being the least satisfied.
- Most Veterans had health insurance for medications, dental care and eye glasses, and had a regular medical doctor at higher rates than the general Canadian population.

Transition and Program Reach:

- Two-thirds of Veterans reported an easy adjustment to civilian life and about one-quarter rated their adjustment as difficult. VAC clients more often reported a difficult adjustment to civilian life.
- VAC programs appear to be targeting those most in need as many Veterans who reported problems were already receiving assistance from VAC. However, some non-clients reported problems with health, disability, and determinants of health, which could reflect unmet needs and/or reach issues. Further analysis is required to clarify why these Veterans are not clients.

Are there any study limitations?

While the survey findings can tell us a lot about recently-released Veterans, it is important to remember that they do not represent the entire Veteran population, because the survey included only Regular Force Veterans who released between 1998 and 2007. Findings cannot be used as proof of cause-and-effect between either military service and post-release health, or VAC programs and Veterans' health status.

Citation: Thompson JM, MacLean MB, Van Til L, Sudom K, Sweet J, Poirier A, Adams J, Horton V, Campbell C, Pedlar D. Survey on Transition to Civilian Life : Report on Regular Force Veterans. Research Directorate. Veterans Affairs Canada and Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis, Department of National Defence. January 4, 2011: 103 p.