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*LIFE AFTER SERVICE STUDIES (LASS) SECONDARY ANALYSIS
(2015 SERIES - RELEASE 19)*

Regular Force Veterans Not in the Labour Force

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Research Questions (Request)

According to the 2013 Life After Service Studies survey, nearly one quarter (23%) of Regular Force Veterans were not in the labour force (i.e., not working and not looking for work). What are the characteristics of this group?

Introduction

In general, persons who are neither employed or unemployed are considered “not in the labour force.” This group is not working and currently not looking for work as opposed to the “unemployed” group (which is considered part of the labour force) who are also not working but are actively looking for work. Those not in the labour force are not looking to work for various personal or health reasons.

Overall, employment is an important factor in a person’s well-being (AFOEM, 2011; ACOEM, 2006; Waddell and Burton, 2006). Employment has also been identified as a key factor in self-worth and identity (Black, 2008), increasing a person’s independence and serving as a source of social support and recognition from others (Ross & Mirowsky, 1995). This finding also holds true for Veterans and, in addition, meaningful employment has been identified as a key factor in a successful transition to civilian life (Ashcroft, 2014) and a “fundamental need” (Castro *et al*, 2014). A recent study from the United States reported the high priority that Veterans themselves place on employment, ranking it second only to family (Meshberg-Cohen *et al*, 2014).

At 7%, the unemployment rate of Veterans is the same as Canadians of similar ages (Thompson *et al*, 2014). What about the 23% of Veterans who are not in the labour force? This report looks at how this rate compares to similarly-aged Canadians and examines the characteristics of Veterans who are not in the labour force.

Methods

The Life After Service Studies (LASS) program of research was established by Veterans Affairs Canada and the Department of National Defence, in collaboration with Statistics Canada, to provide a better understanding of the transition from military to civilian life. To date there have been two cycles of LASS (2010 and 2013) providing detailed multi-dimensional information on the transition experiences of Canadian Veterans (Thompson *et al*, 2014).

As a component of LASS 2013, a computer-assisted telephone interview survey was conducted by Statistics Canada for Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) and the Department of National Defence (DND) in February-March 2013.

The 2,611 Regular Force Veterans surveyed released between January 1, 1998 and August 31, 2012. Rates in this study were calculated from the share data file, using the share weights. This weighting accounts for the unequal probabilities of selection, eligibility, non-response, and sharing, to generate estimates representative of the population (VanTil *et al*, 2014). The sample is representative of Regular Force Veterans living in the general Canadian population who released since 1998.

To learn more about the Regular Force Veterans who are not in the labour force, this study examines their demographic information, main activities in the 12 months prior to the survey, adjustment to civilian life, health status, disability and satisfaction levels.

Results

Of Regular Force Veterans released since 1998, 22.9% (95%CI 21.1, 24.80) were not in the labour force. This rate was compared to Canadians by using the March 2013 Labour Force Survey and age/sex standardizing to the Regular Force Veteran population in LASS 2013. More Veterans were not in the labour force compared to similar aged Canadians (17.6%; 95% CI 15.6, 19.6).

Characteristics of Veterans: Not in the Labour Force

As outlined in Table 1, Regular Force Veterans not in the labour force were, on average, older than others in the survey population (50 vs 42 years of age). However, even with this older average age, more than half (56%) of those not in the labour force released between the ages of 25 and 49, generally considered to be prime labour-force years. This group was also less likely to have completed high school than Veterans in the labour force (i.e., employed and unemployed Veterans).

Of Veterans not in the labour force, 43% reported a difficult adjustment to civilian life, a proportion considerably higher than Veterans in the labour force (23%). This group was also more likely to report dissatisfaction with their main activity and financial situation. Further, their rate of dissatisfaction with life (18%) was more than four times higher than that of Veterans in the labour force (4%). In addition, this group has a much higher rate of activity limitation than those in the labour force (48% vs 17% report “often”).

Those not in the labour force were almost three times as likely as Veterans in the labour force to have medically released from the Forces (41% vs. 15%) and were almost four times as likely to have released at retirement age (11% vs. 3%).

More than half (60%) of those not in the labour force were receiving benefits from VAC, which is double the rate of Veterans in the labour force (28%).

For people with chronic health conditions, disability is defined as difficulty participating in life roles at work, school and home as well as in the community. Almost half (48%) reported that they often experience activity limitations.

Table 1: Veterans Not in Labour Force Compared to Those In Labour Force

	Characteristic	Not in Labour Force ¹ n=612	In the Labour Force ² n=1715
VAC Client	Yes	60.1%	28.2%
Demographic			
Age at Release	Age, Mean (years)	50.3	42.0
	<= 24	9.3%	24.2%
	25 – 29	6.1%	14.0%
	30 – 34	6.7%	10.5%
	35 – 39	9.0%	12.5%
	40 – 44	17.2%	19.5%
	45 – 49	16.8%	10.6%
	50 – 54	20.7%	5.8%
	55+	14.1%	3.0%
Gender	Male	82.5%	87.8%
	Female	17.5%	12.2%
Education	Less than high school diploma or its equivalent	8.2%	4.0%
	High school diploma or a high school equivalency certificate	50.6%	40.1%
	Trade certificate or diploma	6.9%	12.4%
	College/CEGEP/other non-university certificate or diploma	20.0%	22.3%
	University certificate or diploma below the bachelor's level	2.5%	3.0%
	Bachelor's degree (e.g. B.A., B.Sc., LL.B.)	8.5%	10.9%
	University certificate, diploma, degree above the BA level	3.3%	6.9%
Service			
Length of service	< 2 years	7.2%	25.5%
	2 to 9 years	13.5%	21.5%
	10 to 19 years	13.2%	11.0%
	≥ 20 years	66.1%	42.0%
Release type	Involuntary	4.5%	7.3%
	Medical	40.6%	15.2%
	Voluntary	30.2%	58.8%
	Retirement Age	10.9%	2.7%
	Service Complete	13.8%	16.0%
Health Status			
Chronic Health Conditions	Any Physical Health Condition (PHC)	86.9%	69.7%
	Musculoskeletal (MSK)	60.1%	38.5%
	Cardio	30.3%	15.9%
	Gastro	13.8%	7.1%
	Not Free of Pain/Discomfort	50.8%	28.8%
	Any Mental Health Condition (MHC)	42.8%	18.2%
	Mood disorder	33.5%	12.2%
	Anxiety	23.2%	7.5%
	PTSD	27.1%	8.9%

1 Not in the labour force = those not working and not looking for work

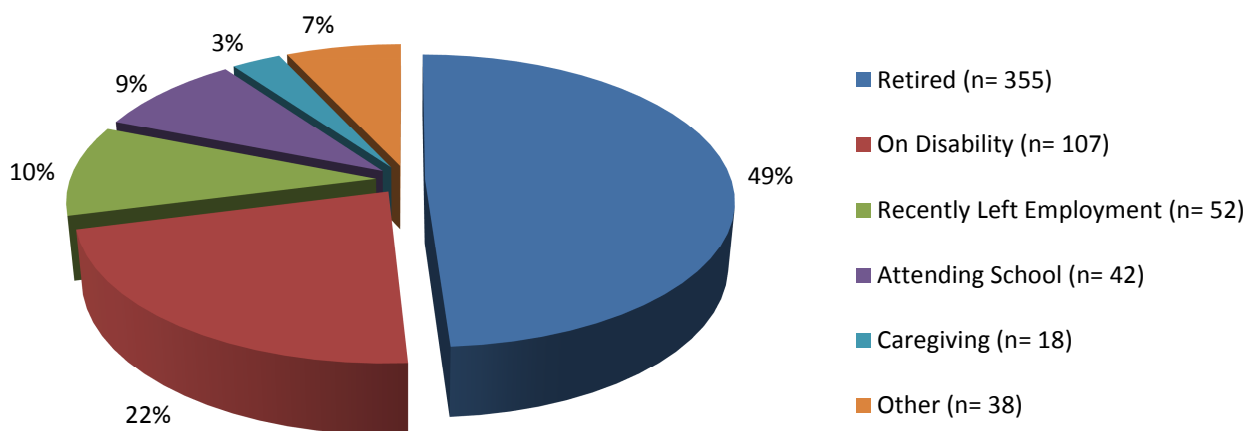
2 In the labour force = employed + unemployed (i.e., not working, but looking for work)

	Characteristic	Not in Labour Force ¹ n=612	In the Labour Force ² n=1715
Comorbidity	PHC 3+	49.7%	25.9%
	MHC 2+	29.4%	8.3%
	PHC and MHC	40.7%	16.8%
	MSK + Pain/discomfort + MHC	25.1%	7.8%
Suicidality	12-month ideation	11.1%	5.3%
Disability			
Activity Limitation	Often	48.0%	16.9%
	Sometimes	23.1%	26.2%
	Never	28.9%	56.9%
ADL Need	Needs Help with at least 1 daily task	41.2%	13.8%
Adjustment			
Adjustment to Civilian Life	Very or moderately easy	45.4%	59.5%
	Neither Difficult or Easy	11.9%	17.8%
	Very or moderately difficult	42.7%	22.7%
Satisfaction			
Satisfaction with Life	Satisfied or Very satisfied	70.8%	90.1%
	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	10.8%	5.8%
	Dissatisfied or Very dissatisfied	18.3%	4.0%
Satisfaction with Main Activity	Satisfied or Very satisfied	65.1%	77.9%
	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	9.5%	11.8%
	Dissatisfied or Very dissatisfied	25.4%	10.4%
Satisfaction with Finances	Satisfied or Very satisfied	67.0%	71.1%
	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	11.5%	11.4%
	Dissatisfied or Very dissatisfied	21.5%	17.5%

Main Activity

As illustrated in Figure 1, almost half (49%) of those not in the labour force reported retirement as their main activity in the year prior to the survey and another third of the group was either “on disability” (22%) or had “recently left employment” (10%).

Figure 1: Main Activity in the Past 12 Months of Those Not in the Labour Force



The top three groups by main activity (retired, on disability and recently left employment) comprise more than 80% of those not in the labour force. Of the 49% who reported retired as their main activity, 55% were aged 50+ and 87% served at least 20 years with the Canadian Armed Forces (Table 2). The majority (61%) of the retired group reported an easy adjustment to civilian life. In terms of health, a large majority (87%) had a physical health condition and about a quarter (24%) reported a mental health condition.

In contrast, the group on disability largely reported a difficult adjustment to civilian life (81%) and a strong majority (83%) medically released from service. Almost all (93%) reported regular activity limitations and three quarters (77%) had both a physical and mental health condition.

Only 3% of the group who recently left employment group are females - considerably lower than the retired and on disability groups (16% and 24%, respectively). While their years of service were similar to those on disability, overall they appear to be more similar to the retired group with respect to characteristics such as activity limitations, adjustment to civilian life and health status.

Table 2: Not in Labour Force: By Most Common Main Activities

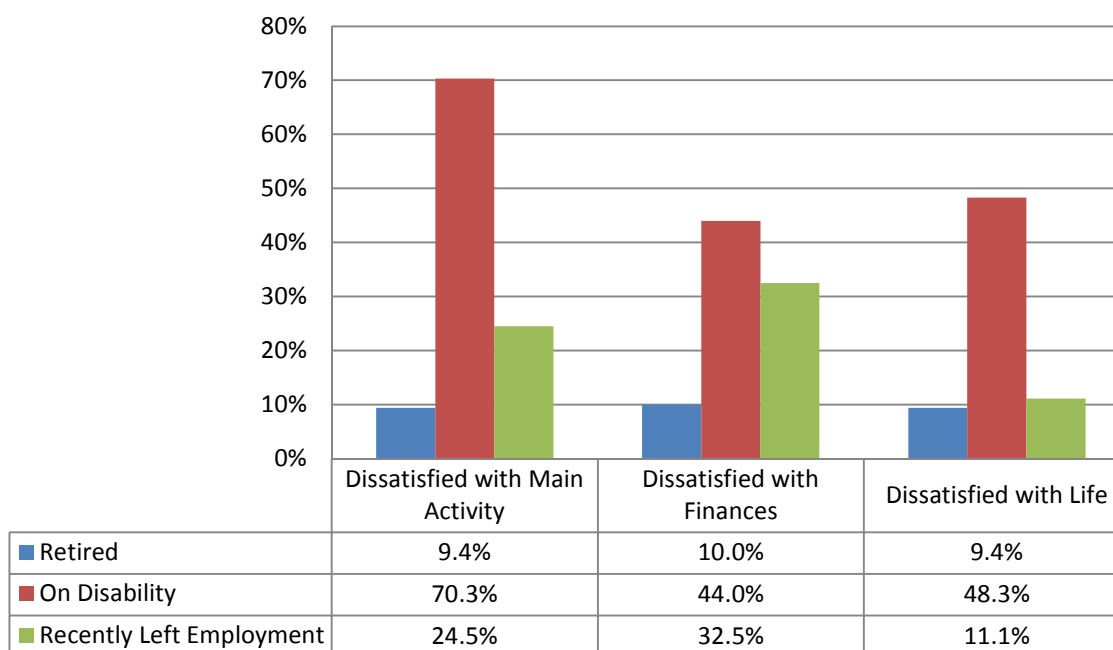
Indicator	Characteristic	Retired (n=355)	On Disability (n=107)	Recently Left Employment (n=52)
Demographic				
Age at Release	<24	0.0%	8.4%	20.6%
	25 - 29	1.4%	6.0%	16.1%
	30 - 34	2.9%	15.0%	.0%
	35 - 39	7.7%	13.7%	16.2%
	40 - 44	14.6%	23.9%	17.6%
	45 - 49	18.8%	20.0%	8.8%
	50 - 54	29.7%	11.1%	18.2%
	55+	25.0%	1.8%	2.5%
Gender	Female	15.8%	23.7%	2.7%
	Male	84.2%	76.3%	97.3%
Marital status at release	Married/Common law	78.3%	63.9%	62.9%
	Widowed/Separated/Divorced	14.0%	18.5%	10.8%
	Single/Never married	7.7%	17.6%	26.3%
Education at time of release	Less than high school diploma or its equivalent	11.3%	6.4%	5.3%
	High school diploma or a high school equivalency certificate	51.5%	48.3%	48.1%
	Trade certificate or diploma	4.0%	9.5%	17.3%
	College/CEGEP/other non-university certificate or diploma	16.0%	27.4%	16.8%
	University certificate or diploma below the bachelor's level	2.0%	3.1%	4.4%
	Bachelor's degree (e.g. B.A., B.Sc., LL.B.)	10.7%	5.3%	5.6%
	University certificate, diploma, degree above the BA level	4.6%	0.0%	2.5%
Service				
Length of service	< 2 years	0.0%	6.2%	23.6%
	2 to 9 years	3.2%	20.1%	16.6%
	10 to 19 years	9.4%	28.1%	11.5%
	≥ 20 years	87.4%	45.6%	48.4%
Release type	Involuntary	1.8%	4.0%	11.9%
	Medical	28.6%	82.7%	19.1%
	Voluntary	32.5%	7.7%	47.5%
	Retirement Age	18.0%	.4%	4.6%
	Service Complete	19.0%	5.1%	16.9%
Rank	Senior Officers	17.2%	1.7%	10.3%
	Junior Officers	9.5%	2.2%	5.0%
	Cadet	.0%	.4%	2.9%
	Senior NCM	47.9%	28.6%	28.0%
	Junior NCM	25.0%	49.4%	22.7%
	Private	.5%	8.9%	4.3%
	Recruit	0.0%	8.7%	26.8%
Service branch	Air Force	45.5%	27.7%	15.2%
	Army	34.4%	58.0%	73.3%
	Navy	20.1%	14.3%	11.5%

Indicator	Characteristic	Retired (n=355)	On Disability (n=107)	Recently Left Employment (n=52)
Afghanistan Service	Yes	11.1%	12.2%	18.8%
Health Status				
Chronic Health Conditions	Any Physical Health Condition (PHC)	87.3%	96.4%	74.4%
	Musculoskeletal (MSK)	59.9%	73.8%	46.1%
	Cardio	36.9%	31.6%	23.5%
	Gastro	10.7%	28.8%	2.3%
	Not Free of Pain/Discomfort	45.8%	77.8%	34.8%
	Any Mental Health Condition (MHC)	24.7%	81.4%	39.0%
	Mood disorder	17.5%	73.2%	27.9%
	Anxiety	10.3%	50.6%	28.0%
	PTSD	15.7%	54.9%	20.7%
Comorbidity	PHC 3+	46.3%	71.4%	32.4%
	MHC 2+	13.3%	64.1%	31.5%
	PHC and MHC	24.4%	77.8%	38.6%
	MSK + Pain/discomfort + MHC	14.9%	53.3%	18.7%
Suicidality	12-month ideation	4.3%	25.3%	13.6%
Disability				
Activity Limitation	Often	35.4%	92.5%	34.5%
	Sometimes	29.8%	6.2%	16.7%
	Never	34.8%	1.4%	48.8%
ADL Need	Needs Help with at least 1 daily task	28.1%	86.2%	23.6%
Adjustment				
Adjustment to Civilian Life	Very or moderately difficult	27.3%	80.6%	33.2%
	Neither difficult nor easy	10.9%	11.6%	15.3%
	Very or moderately easy	61.7%	7.7%	51.5%

Satisfaction

Reviewing the satisfaction levels across the top three main activities shows considerable variances among the groups. Those on disability were far more likely to be dissatisfied with their main activity, finances and with life in general than those who reported being retired or recently left employment (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Dissatisfaction by Main Activity in the Past 12 Months of Those Not in Labour Force



Discussion

Almost one quarter of Regular Force Veterans were not in the labour force. This group was more likely than Veterans in the labour force to report a difficult adjustment to civilian life, comorbidity, and activity limitations. They were also less likely to be satisfied with life, their main activity and finances. Recalling that research has shown labour force engagement positively benefits overall health as well as satisfaction with life, and an easier adjustment to civilian life for Veterans, would assisting these Veterans with re-entering the labour force help them achieve greater outcomes and overall satisfaction levels? Is re-entering the labour force even a possibility for those in this group?

Retired?

Many of those not in the labour force have characteristics that suggest they have finished their labour force engagement. For example, 11% reported a “retirement age” release, 66% served for 20 years or more with the Canadian Armed Forces and almost half reported retirement as their main activity. These factors may lead one to assume they are past employment age with no further plans to work. However, only 25% of the “retirement as main activity group” were aged 55+. The remaining 75% were between 25-54 years at the time of release - ages often associated with being in the labour force in Canada. A recent study reported that approximately two-thirds of working Canadians entered their fifties in long-term jobs (Bonikowska and Schellenberg, 2014). More than half of Canadians in the study who retired from long-term jobs were re-employed within a decade, suggesting retirement from a long-term career does not necessarily mean disengagement from the labour force.

Further, is it possible that Veterans have a different concept of the word retirement than those Canadians whose entire employment tenure is spent in a civilian career? For example, military members of a certain rank keep their title upon retirement even if they move on to civilian careers; e.g., Major-General (Retired). As such, their perception may be that since they have left their primary career of military service, with which they feel the greatest association/attachment, that they are indeed “retired” even if they are part of the civilian labour force in some capacity. However, given those Veterans who identify themselves as retired have very low levels of dissatisfaction with life or their main activity, they do not appear to be a group requiring targeted supports for labour force reengagement.

Temporary Disengagement?

Almost 10% of those not in the labour force reported their main activity as attending school and it is likely they may intend to return to the work following completion of their training. In addition, a quarter of those not in the labour force were dissatisfied with their main activity suggesting that many in this group would welcome a change to their main activity if possible, potentially re-engaging in the labour force.

Further, according to the 2010 Survey on Transition to Civilian Life, the proportion of Regular Force Veterans who worked or ran a business increased from 53% in the first year post-release to 75% in the year prior to the survey (Thompson *et al*, 2011). The study reported this increase was mainly offset by reductions in the numbers of those attending school or training and those looking for work. This finding supports the theory that some of the Regular Force Veterans currently not in the labour force may well return to work in coming months/years.

Too Unwell to Work?

At first glance, it may appear that many of those not in the labour force have health conditions preventing them from working – 22% report being on disability as their main activity and overall they have much higher rates of activity limitation, chronic health conditions and comorbidity than Veterans in the labour force. However, evidence suggests that not only can many of those with a disability engage in employment (VanTil *et al*, 2013), doing so can actually support recovery and enhance wellbeing (Waddell and Burton, 2006).

According to the 2012 Canadian Survey on Disability (Statistics Canada, 2014), 55% of Canadians with a mental health-related disability (aged 15-64) were not in the labour force and most of these people (78%) indicated that the reason for this status is related to their condition(s). However, many (17%) suggested that some type of accommodation would allow them to work and more than a quarter (26%) planned to look for work within the next 12 months. Reasons for intending to look for work included an expected improvement in their condition (36%); workplace changes/improvements (14%); and planned training (14%).

The results suggest the potential of programs and supports such as VAC's Rehabilitation program to play a key role in helping Veterans re-enter the labour force. It would be interesting to know if and how many of these Veterans who are not in the labour force are

aware of and/or have participated in the Department's Rehabilitation program – more research into the reach of the Rehabilitation program is required.

Conclusion

This study found that Veterans who are not in the labour force were more likely than those in the labour force to have difficulty adjusting to civilian life, experience comorbidity and activity limitations and also to be dissatisfied with life, their finances and their main activity. Those not in the labour force were also more likely to have been medically released or released at retirement age.

Examining this group by main activity provided some useful insights. For example, the largest group by main activity self-reported as "Retired". The large majority of this group had more than 20 years of service, had an "easy" adjustment to civilian life and reported high levels of satisfaction with their lives, finances and main activities. Similarly, the majority of the third largest group by main activity ("Recently Left Employment") were also satisfied, with half (52%) reporting a "very or moderately easy" adjustment to civilian life.

The group that would appear to most benefit from VAC interventions and other employment supports are those "On Disability" (the second largest of the main activity group). The majority of the group medically released (83%), reported a difficult adjustment to civilian life (81%) and have regular activity limitations (93%). In light of this and their high dissatisfaction levels, consideration should be given to targeting transition and employment supports to the "On Disability" group.

Requestor(s)/Acknowledgement

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