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*LIFE AFTER SERVICE STUDIES (LASS) SECONDARY ANALYSIS
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Identifying Afghanistan Service

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Research Directorate Data Report

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Research Questions

In order to inform program planning, forecasting and further research, this study examines the numbers who have Afghanistan service according to DND administrative data, the extent to which VAC records capture this service, the numbers who have contacted VAC and received benefits; and the numbers found among the Survey on Transition to Civilian Life Survey population.

Background

Canada has participated in the majority of peace support operations mandated by the UN Security Council. Tens of thousands of Canadians have served in more than 40 international peace support operations. While many of these operations involved small numbers of Canadian military personnel, Veterans deployed to larger, more recent operations such as the Gulf War (1990-91) and Afghanistan (2001-present) can be studied within existing research data from the Life After Service Studies through the use of nominal rolls.

A nominal roll is a 'snapshot' of individual service gathered from service records. Australia is a leader in the development of nominal rolls with completed nominal rolls for those who served in the Second World War, Korea, the Gulf War and Vietnam. Population health study samples from the Australian Korean nominal roll have influenced policy in both Australia and Canada.

In Canada, the Gulf War nominal roll is the only available validated listing of a specific deployment¹. After the end of the hostilities, a number of Gulf and Kuwait War Veterans began reporting a broad range of symptoms and illnesses. This reporting led to many studies on the health of Gulf War Veterans, including two studies commissioned by the Department of National Defence, using the Gulf War Veterans nominal roll. The first study was a survey to examine self-reported health status and the second was a cancer and mortality study conducted by Statistics Canada².

Nominal rolls not only make it possible to conduct these types of studies but can also help VAC project the impact of deployments on demand for benefits and services. For example, according to VAC records as of October 14, 2010, 8,516 Afghanistan Veterans had contacted VAC. It is unknown whether this is a complete picture, what proportion of all who served this represents and how long after service they presented with conditions. Also, while the Survey on Transition to Civilian Life³ found that most (65%) Veterans had deployed at least once, specific deployments were not identified. Record linkage to a nominal roll of Afghanistan Veterans would allow for studies on the health and well-being of these Veterans.

1 Gilroy, Goss. "Health Study of Canadian Forces Personnel Involved in the 1991 Conflict in the Persian Gulf." Ottawa, 1998.

2 Statistics Canada. "The Canadian Persian Gulf Cohort Study: Detailed Report, prepared for the Gulf War Veterans Cohort Study Advisory Committee." 2005.

3 Thompson JM, MacLean MB, Van Til L, Sudom K, Sweet J, Poirier A, Adams J.. *Survey on Transition to Civilian Life: Report on Regular Force Veterans*. Charlottetown: Veterans Affairs Canada, January 2011.

Method

Administrative data were extracted from two DND sources that identify Afghanistan Veterans, one used for planning deployments and the other for issuing medals. In November 2009, National Defence extracted data from the Canadian Forces Task Plans and Operations (CFTPO) dataset. The system that collects this data is used to plan and fill deployment positions and is considered quite accurate. The extract included Regular and Reserve Force components. Records for 22 operations (tasks) associated with service in Afghanistan were selected. Completed deployments were selected and the records aggregated to obtain the number of unique persons deployed.

The medals data was extracted from administrative data in February 2010 for three types of medals awarded for Afghanistan service all requiring at least 30 days of continuous service: 1. The General Campaign Star (GCS) indicates service awarded from April 24, 2003; 2. The General Service Medal (GSM) indicates service awarded from April 24, 2003; and 3. The South-West Asia Service Medal (SWASM) specific to Afghanistan service was awarded from September 2001. The medals records were aggregated to obtain unique persons and linked to the CFTPO data using service number to determine matches.

At VAC, service information is not usually captured until an application for benefits has been received. The extent to which VAC's systems capture service information was first examined by linking VAC records to the CFTPO data (Afghanistan service) using service number. When a Veteran contacts VAC, their name, date of birth and service number are generally entered into the Client Service Delivery Network. The records containing service numbers were extracted on January 4, 2010.

Statistics on the numbers of Afghanistan Veterans in receipt of disability benefits were obtained from the Statistics Directorate and compared to the numbers who served in Afghanistan according to DND records. To determine the number of Afghanistan Veterans who were respondents on the survey, the CFTPO data (Afghanistan service) was record linked to the survey data using service number.

Results

The CFTPO dataset contained more than 786,000 records of planned and completed deployments from 2001 to 2011. The majority of the positions had been filled. Of the filled positions, a total of more than 51,000 records indicated Afghanistan service, of which about 39,000 had completed deployments as of September 2009. This data represented 29,551 unique Veterans. The medals data included fewer Veterans than the CFTPO data. The majority of Veterans were found on both datasets.

Table 1: Afghanistan Veterans - DND Administrative Data

Canadian Forces Task Plans and Operations (CFTPO)¹	
Total deployment records planned and completed 2001 to 2010	786,011
Filled positions	522,962
Afghanistan service records	51,019
Records with service complete ²	39,067
Veterans deployed to Afghanistan	29,551
Medals³	
General Campaign Star (GCS)	20,066
General Service Medal (GSM)	1,985
The South-West Asia Service Medal (SWASM)	8,007
Total Records	30,058
Veterans issued medals for Afghanistan service	27,190
Data Match CFTPO & Medals	22,955

1. Extract as of November 2009.

2. Last completed deployment date of September 8, 2009.

3. Medals awarded for Afghanistan service data extract as of February 2010.

Half of the Afghanistan Veterans identified through DND planning records had previous contact with VAC, almost one-quarter were in receipt of disability benefits, 14% had conditions or injuries found to be related to their service in Afghanistan and about 7% were captured on the Survey on Transition to Civilian Life.

Table 2: DND Afghanistan Service Records

	DND Afghanistan Service Records n=29,551	
	#	% of pop
Contact with VAC ¹	14,749	49.9%
In receipt of Disability Benefits ²	7,061	23.9%
In receipt of Disability Benefits related to service ²	4,181	14.4%
Survey on Transition to Civilian Life (N=32,015) ³	2,139	7.2%

1. Match to service numbers on the VAC Reporting Database as of January 4, 2010 (757,232).

2. Source: Statistics Directorate, clients as of December 2011 for Afghanistan. The service was assumed to have been captured by VAC and was not record linked to the DND Service Records.

3. Weighted population estimate. Sample size was 223 of a total sample size of 3,154.

Discussion/Further Study

A record linkage of DND and VAC records found that almost 30,000 Veterans had served in Afghanistan from 2001 to September 2009 and that about 15,000 or half of these Veterans had contact with Veterans Affairs. However, VAC's systems alone are identifying far fewer Veterans as having contacted VAC, about 8,500. The reasons for this discrepancy are likely related to the process for collecting service information. In many cases service in Afghanistan is not captured at contact. Service in Afghanistan is more likely to be captured when there is an application for benefits and particularly when the application directly relates to service in Afghanistan.

Less than 10% of members who served in Afghanistan were captured on the Survey on Transition to Civilian Life, which included Regular Force Veterans released from 1998 to 2007. The remaining population would include those who served in Afghanistan but were serving in the Canadian Forces at the time of the survey in 2010, those released after 2007 and those who served as a member of the Reserves.

While it is unknown how many are yet to apply for benefits, if past patterns hold, it is likely that the Afghanistan mission will have an impact over the longer-term. Currently, the majority (74%) of new Canadian Forces disability benefit recipients become clients after leaving service with an average of 25 years from release to intake⁴. Further study is needed to examine and compare the patterns of client intake and conditions specifically for Afghanistan Veterans to develop program participation projections that account for Canada's involvement in this large mission.

Conclusion

DND records identified almost 30,000 Afghanistan Veterans as of September 2009. About 15,000 or half of these Veterans had contact with VAC, compared to the about 8,500 identified through VAC's records. Almost one-quarter of the Afghanistan Veterans identified through DND records were in receipt of VAC Disability Benefits and 14% were in receipt of benefits related to their service in Afghanistan. Less than 10% of Afghanistan Veterans were captured on the Survey on Transition to Civilian Life, indicating that further study of the health of these Veterans will likely be limited.

Requestor(s)/Acknowledgement

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⁴ MacLean MB, Sweet J, Thompson JM, VanTil L and Poirier A. *Predicting Receipt of Disability Benefits*. Technical Report, Charlottetown: Research Directorate, Veterans Affairs Canada, February 2011.