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Effectiveness of Transition Screening - Evidence from the Survey on Transition to Civilian Life

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Research Questions

To ensure the most effective allocation of transition services, this study asks the following questions:

1. Are the majority of Transition Interviews with those Canadian Forces (CF) members who are most at risk of experiencing adjustment to civilian life difficulties?
2. Is the Transition Interview screening effectively identifying at-risk CF members?

Background

While the majority of Veterans reported an easy adjustment to civilian life on the Survey on Transition to Civilian Life (STCL) conducted in 2010,¹ VAC policy is to offer all releasing CF members a Transition Interview (phased in beginning in June 2004)². The intent is to determine the type and level of support that a CF member and/or family member may require. Many Regular Force members choose not to receive a Transition Interview. Of the 11,522 Regular Force members released in 2006-07 and 2007-08, only 60% had completed a Transition Interview.³

The Transition Interview is generally conducted just prior to release and includes questions designed to determine general knowledge of VAC, physical and mental health of the CF member and his/her family, financial concerns, housing arrangements, social support, community connections, and impact of release on lifestyle. After the interview, the VAC employee (generally a Case Manager or a Client Service Agent) conducting the interview records any resulting actions required and his/her assessment of whether the member is at risk for an unsuccessful re-establishment.

The STCL found that the majority of Veterans (62%) reported an easy (very easy or moderately easy) adjustment to civilian life. Those who released at age 19 or younger were the most likely to report an easy adjustment (83%), followed by senior officers (79%) and those who enrolled in the 1960s (77%). Those who released for medical reasons (36%) were the least likely to report an easy adjustment, followed by those who were widowed, separated or divorced (43%), those released as junior NCMs (48%) and those released with 10 to 19 years of service (48%).

Method

Near the beginning of the STCL, Veterans were asked: "In general, how has the adjustment to civilian life been since you were released from the Canadian Forces?"

1 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, Charlottetown, and Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis, Department of National Defence, Ottawa. 04 January 2011:103 p.

2 Transition Interview Practice and Procedure Manual. September-October 2005. Archived April 21, 2011. URL: http://today-infosdujour.vac-acc.gc.ca/content/infoexchange/docs/tran_interviiv.pdf

3 MacLean MB, Sweet J, Thompson JM, Van Til LD, & Poirier A. Predicting Receipt of Disability Benefits. Veterans Affairs Canada. Research Directorate. Technical Report. February 28, 2011:32p.

The response categories included the following: “very difficult;” “moderately difficult;” “neither difficult nor easy;” “moderately easy;” and “very easy.” During the Transition Interview, the following assessment is made: “Is the member at risk for an unsuccessful re-establishment?” Response categories are “yes” and “no.”

Transition Interviews from VAC administrative data as of March 2010 were linked to the Regular Forces release dataset for 1998 to 2007⁴ and the STCL 2010 share data (3,154 Regular Force Veteran respondents released from 1998 to 2007)⁵. The subset of respondents released from 2006 and 2007 when Transition Interviews were available was selected for analysis. The objective was to determine whether members who were most at risk of adjustment to civilian life difficulties were getting Transition Interviews. The proportion of Transition Interviews was examined by the adjustment to civilian life response categories overall and for the demographic and service characteristics determined to have the most influence on difficult adjustment (length of service, release type, and marital status)³.

To determine whether Transition Interview screening is effective at identifying those at risk, an agreement rate was calculated between difficult adjustment to civilian life on the STCL and risk of unsuccessful re-establishment on the Transition Interview.

Results

About 60% of Regular Force Veterans had a Transition Interview, and the majority of them did not report a difficult adjustment to civilian life. Sixty-two percent of Regular Force Veterans released in 2006 and 2007 had a Transition Interview compared to 62% of STCL respondents. The majority (71%) of the Transition Interviews with the STCL respondents were with those who reported very or moderately easy or neither difficult nor easy adjustment to civilian life. The remaining 29% were with those who reported a moderately or very difficult adjustment (Table 1).

Table 1: Veteran Reported Adjustment to Civilian Life by Transition Interview Risk Assessment

Survey on Transition to Civilian Life: Adjustment to Civilian Life	Transition Interview: Is the member at risk for an unsuccessful re-establishment?		
	Yes	No	Total
Very difficult	36.4%	5.1%	8.8%
Moderately difficult	25.6%	19.3%	20.0%
Neither difficult nor easy	16.9%	13.4%	13.8%
Moderately easy	14.9%	27.0%	25.6%
Very easy	6.2%	35.2%	31.8%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

4 An extract from DND’s Human Resource Management System.

5 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, Charlottetown, and Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis, Department of National Defence, Ottawa. 04 January 2011:103 p.

The groups least likely to report easy adjustment account for the minority of the Transition Interviews. Three-quarters (75%) of Transition Interviews were done with married/common law Veterans. Few (10%) were with widowed/separated or divorced Veterans. However, those who were widowed/separated or divorced were the least likely to report easy adjustment. Among length of service groups, almost two-thirds (63%) of Transition Interviews were with those with 20 years or more service while few (10%) were with those serving 10 to 19 years. However, those serving 10 to 19 years were least likely to report easy adjustment. Also, over half (58%) of Transition Interviews were with those who voluntarily released, while almost one-third (32%) were with those who medically released (Table 2). Those who medically released were the least likely to report easy adjustment to civilian life.

Table 2: Proportion of STCL Respondents Receiving a Transition Interview by Selected At Risk Groups

Risk Groups		% Receiving Transition Interview
Marital status at time of survey	Married/Common law	75.1%
	Widowed/Separated/Divorced	9.9%
	Single/Never married	14.8%
Length of Service	<2 years	4.0%
	2 - 9 years	23.8%
	10 - 19 years	9.6%
	20+ years	62.5%
Release Type	Involuntary	x
	Medical	32.4%
	Voluntary	58.0%
	Retirement Age	5.3%
	Service Complete	x

x indicates sample size of less than 30

Among the Transition Interviews with STCL respondents, 12% were identified as at risk of unsuccessful re-establishment (Table 3). The overall agreement rate was 74% and was much higher for those who reported easy or neither difficult nor easy adjustment than for those who reported difficult adjustment. Combined with those who reported difficult adjustment, only one-quarter were identified as at risk on the Transition Interview.

Table 3: Agreement Rate: Transition Interview and Veteran Reported Adjustment to Civilian Life

Survey on Transition to Civilian Life: Adjustment to Civilian Life	Transition Interview: Is the member at risk for an unsuccessful re-establishment?			Agreement Rate*
	Yes	No	Total	
Very difficult	48.7%	51.3%	100.0%	48.7%
Moderately difficult	15.1%	84.9%	100.0%	15.1%
Neither difficult nor easy	14.5%	85.5%	100.0%	85.5%
Moderately easy	6.9%	93.1%	100.0%	93.1%
Very easy	2.3%	97.7%	100.0%	97.7%
Total	11.8%	88.2%	100.0%	74.0%

* Yes unsuccessful re-establishment and "very or moderately difficult" adjustment or no for "neither difficult nor easy" or "moderately or very easy" adjustment.

Discussion

This study found that most Transition Interviews are being conducted with those CF members who are least at risk. This raises the following questions: Do all Veterans need a Transition Interview? Could some Veterans be screened out based on a mixture of demographic and service characteristics?

Further Study

The Transition Interviews were conducted a few years prior to the survey and therefore VAC/DND interventions and referrals might have influenced the adjustment outcomes. Further study would determine the impact that Transition Interviews had on adjustment outcomes.

The low agreement rate between the Transition Interview and the reported adjustment to civilian life points to further research needed to determine the factors associated with risk of difficult adjustment.

Conclusion

This paper set out to answer two questions: (1) Are the majority of Transition Interviews with those Canadian Forces (CF) members who are most at risk of experiencing adjustment to civilian life difficulties? and (2) Is the Transition Interview screening effectively identifying at-risk CF members? The answer to both these questions is essentially no. Most Transition Interviews are with members least at risk of adjustment difficulties following release. More targeting of at risk groups would be a more effective use of resources than the current policy of offering Transition Interviews to all releasing members. Members who do have a Transition Interview and are at risk are unlikely to be identified by VAC. The interview itself identified only one-quarter of those at risk.

Limitations

- The results cannot be generalized to all Veterans as they represent only a sub-component of the Veteran population (i.e., Regular Force Veterans released from 1998 to 2007).
- Transition Interviews for the STCL population were conducted a few years prior to the survey and therefore VAC/DND interventions and referrals might have influenced the adjustment outcomes.

Requestor(s)

David Varis, Andrea MacDonald, Delores Wilson and Anita Burdett of the National Case-Management Unit reviewed the paper prior to publication and plan to use the results to examine potential modifications to the Transition Interview process.