

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Is Anyone Listening? An Ecological Systems Perspective on Veterans Transitioning from the Military to Academia

Bagby, J. H., Barnard-Brak, L., Thompson, L. W., & Sulak, T. N. (2015). Is anyone listening? An ecological systems perspective on veterans transitioning from the military to academia. *Military Behavioral Health*, 3(4), 219-229. doi:10.1080/21635781.2015.1057306

SUMMARY: The beliefs and attitudes of 11 student Veterans transitioning from being on Active Duty during the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts into a private, faith-based university were explored through a qualitative phenomenological study. The lens of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory was utilized to probe at the various relationship levels that impacted the student Veterans' lived experiences

KEY FINDINGS:

- The participants described how the military offered security, community, and camaraderie.
- Participants often struggled to find a niche and to communicate their experiences to younger students as well as their instructors.
- Participants with families felt the need to make up lost time with their spouses and children and struggled to develop effective study habits.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Foster open dialogues among students who are Service members, Veterans, and non-military
- Develop workshops for military families as they prepare for major transitions (e.g. relocation, starting university, deployment)
- Engage student Service members and Veterans in the development of on-campus support groups

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Support collaboration between military branches and community level organizations to more effectively help military families navigate transitions
- Recommend that higher education institutions have student-run Veteran organizations
- Support professional development for education professionals who work with military families (e.g., teachers, counselors, social workers) about preparing families for major life transitions

This product is the result of a partnership funded by the Department of Defense between the Office of Military Community and Family Policy and the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture through a grant/cooperative agreement with The University of Minnesota.



Putting Research to Work for Military Families



METHODS

- Participants were recruited at a faith-based university through an e-mail invitation.
- Analysis began with team members independently reviewing each transcript many times and dividing up the comments into similar but unstructured categories. Team members met, discussed their categories and agreed upon five subgroups for prior military experiences and six subgroups for the Veterans' experiences at the university.
- At the end of the analysis, an independent researcher was added to check the groups' findings.

PARTICIPANTS

- From a total of 75 student Veterans, 12 responded to the e-mail solicitation and 11 ended up participating in the full study. There were 10 males and one female participant.
- Criteria for inclusion in the study required having served in an Active Duty role during the post-9/11 conflicts in Afghanistan or Iraq and enrolled in university.
- Nine were enlisted and two were officers, and they represented the Army, Air Force, Marines, and Navy.
- Participants' ages, race and ethnicity were not provided.

LIMITATIONS

- The participant sample included only those student Veterans who volunteered to be interviewed, possibly resulting in response bias.
- Participants were drawn from one private, faith-based university. Student Veterans from other private, faith-based institutions may have differed in their experiences.
- With only one female and two officers, further study would need to be done to understand these groups' transition experiences.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Compare public and private institutions' provision of student-Veteran services and correlating services with student learning outcomes and retention
- Investigate in greater depth student Veterans and their transition experiences from the military to academia in other types of institutions (e.g., research, liberal arts, community college)
- Examine strategies higher education institutions use to support student Veterans transitions and success

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
<https://reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>