

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
National  
Guard

## Civilian Employment Among Recently Returning Afghanistan and Iraq National Guard Veterans

Burnett-Zeigler, I., Valenstein, M., Ilgen, M., Blow, A. J., Gorman, L. A., & Zivin, K. (2011). Civilian employment among recently returning Afghanistan and Iraq National Guard veterans. *Military Medicine*, 176(6), 639-646. doi:10.7205/milmed-d-10-00450

**SUMMARY:** National Guard members are often faced with the difficult task of finding a new job following deployment. Service members who were employed or unemployed at 45-60 days after demobilization were compared on several variables (e.g., demographics, deployments, mental and physical health). Poorer education, income, and mental health status and certain demographic characteristics (e.g., female, unmarried) were related to higher unemployment, but deployments and recent combat exposure were related to greater employment rates.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Less than half (41%) of National Guard Service members were employed at a reintegration workshop 45-60 days following demobilization from deployment; of those employed, 79% were full-time.
- Unemployed Service members were more likely to be female, younger, unmarried, and have less education, lower family income, and poorer mental health.
- Unexpectedly, Service members who had experienced multiple deployments and recent combat exposure were more likely to be employed.
- Among employed Service members, those with full-time employment were more likely to be older and have higher family incomes, better mental health, poorer physical health, and no alcohol abuse problems.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate Service members and their families about the negative effects of alcohol abuse and mental health concerns on employment and encourage treatment for these difficulties
- Provide workshops on job and interviewing skills (e.g., resume writing, interview preparation, networking) for Service members and their families
- Offer career exploration classes for Service members interested in exploring job or education choices or making a career change following deployment

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend collaborations with community career and networking agencies to provide Service members with access to job openings and career opportunities, especially post-deployment
- Continue to support higher education for Service members who have deployed in order to increase job opportunities and options
- Encourage education for providers working with military families about barriers to employment post-deployment and available career resources for Service members

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## METHODS

- National Guard Service members in the Midwestern U.S. who had recently returned from deployment were recruited at a mandatory reintegration workshop 45-60 days following demobilization.
- Service members completed surveys about mental and physical health status and treatment, substance use, employment, and overall functioning with a 60% survey response rate.
- Several variables (e.g., gender, age, race, education, income, marital status, deployments, combat exposure, mental and physical health) were compared between employed and unemployed Service members.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 585 National Guard members (87% male), and most were between the ages of 18-30 years (58%).
- Participants identified as White (75%), Black (4%) or another race (21%).
- The majority of participants had at least some college education (62%), were married, engaged, or cohabitating (63%), had returned from their first deployment (55%), and had no recent combat exposure (56%).
- A notable portion of Service members reported moderate or severe body pain (34%), posttraumatic stress disorder (14%), depression (24%), significant anxiety (15%), and alcohol abuse (36%).

## LIMITATIONS

- Participants may differ in unknown ways from those who chose not to participate (40%), including on employment and levels of mental and physical health.
- Data were cross sectional, preventing causal conclusions from being drawn about the relationships between deployment, personnel characteristics, and employment.
- No data regarding pre-deployment employment status of Service members was collected and this variable may have affected results.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Further examine the effect of alcohol abuse and other substance misuse on post-deployment employment
- Explore other factors that potentially affect employment following deployment, including location, level of job certification or education, and employment status pre-deployment
- Compare employment rates between Service members with combat-related health problems versus pre-existing or non-combat-related health problems

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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