

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

The Impact of Prior Deployment Experience on Civilian Employment after Military Service

Horton, J. L., Jacobson, I. G., Wong, C. A., Wells, T. S., Boyko, E. J., Smith, B., ... Smith, T. C. (2013). The impact of prior deployment experience on civilian employment after military service. *Occupational & Environmental Medicine*, 70(6), 408-417. doi:10.1136/oemed-2012-101073

SUMMARY: The study examined whether deployment experiences, health, demographic, and military-related characteristics were associated with civilian employment after military service. Of the 9,099 former U.S. Active Duty Service members in the study, 17% were unemployed after military service. Mental health symptoms, race, gender, education, and physical health were found to be associated with unemployment after separation from the military.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Depressive and anxiety disorders, being Black or female, less education, and poor physical health were associated with unemployment.
- Deployment experience (with or without combat) and posttraumatic stress disorder were not associated with employment status following military separation.
- Unemployment was least likely for Service members who were married, separated for the military for longer than one year, and who completed at least a bachelor's degree.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop support groups around coping with unemployment for Service members and families who are at-risk of prolonged unemployment
- Encourage Service members to participate in job placement programs to increase their chances of employment
- Provide training to professionals who work with military families about how to support military families as they prepare to transition to civilian employment

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Increase awareness (e.g., educational materials) about the possible employment challenges Service members and their families encounter after military service
- Support the creation of programs that teach Service members and their families about financial literacy and preparing for possible prolonged unemployment
- Urge routine screening of mental and physical health symptoms that increase the chance for difficulties obtaining employment after military service

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METHODS

- Data were collected from the Millennium Cohort Study. Service members completed a baseline survey while they were in Active Duty status and at least one follow up survey.
- Participants were included in the study if they separated from the military between the baseline and follow-up surveys.
- Variables that were measured included: civilian employment, deployment and combat experience, and demographic, health, and military-related characteristics.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 9,099 former U.S. Active Duty Service members from all service branches.
- The sample was 75% male, and 67% White, 13% Black, and 20% identified as another ethnicity.
- The average age of Service members when they separated from the military was 37.3 years (SD = 9.1).

LIMITATIONS

- Specific details about employment and unemployment were not captured (e.g., if they were physically unable to work or recently lost a job) that would have impacted interpretation of the results.
- Survey non-response due to attrition may have been a problem, as Service members who separated from the military for reasons other than retirement had a higher probability of non-response for the follow-up survey.
- Physical and mental health outcomes were self-reported, which may have led to unreliable and inconsistent results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Develop studies that explore the reasons for increased unemployment rates among female and Black Service members
- Compare employment rates of Service members who participate in a job placement program after military service with Service members who do not
- Explore the relationship between mental health symptoms and physical injuries with long-term employment or unemployment among Service members

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