

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



**Focus:**  
Multiple  
Branches

## Perspectives of Veterans With Mild Traumatic Brain Injury on Community Reintegration: Making Sense of Unplanned Separation From Service

Libin, A. V., Scholten, J., Dromerick A. W., Danford, E., Cichon, S., Bruner, D., ... Blackman, M. R. (2017). Perspectives of veterans with mild traumatic brain injury on community reintegration: Making sense of unplanned separation from service. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 87(2), 129-138. doi:10.1037/ort0000253

**SUMMARY:** Many military members struggle with the reintegration into civilian life, especially when this transition was unplanned due to mild traumatic brain injury. This study interviewed eight Veterans with mild traumatic brain injuries to better understand their experiences of leaving the military and reentering civilian life. Some participants reported the need to distance themselves from their military identity while others felt they needed to maintain their military identity throughout civilian life. All participants perceived reintegration as a crisis equal to that of their injury.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Veterans viewed their relationship with the military as a relationship that consists of acculturation, service, and training, but they were also regretful because of the separation due to their injury.
- Veterans viewed their relationship with the civilian community as one of misunderstanding in that that civilians do not fully understand the military.
- Veterans viewed their relationship with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) as mixed; some Veterans felt frustrated that civilian VA health care providers could not understand their experience, while others strongly defended the bond between Veterans and the VA.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Develop workshops that help engage family members in actively supporting Service members who will soon reintegrate into civilian life
- Provide information for families and civilians about the crisis of unplanned reintegration for Service members
- Disseminate information for Service members on ways to cope with the reintegration process

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that address the challenges Service members encounter during reintegration
- Recommend education of professionals who work with military families on the possible effects reintegration into civilian life has on Service members and their families
- Promote reintegration programs that aid in assisting Service members to successfully adjust to employment in the civilian sector

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## METHODS

- Participants were recruited from a sample of Veterans participating in a focus group and additional Veterans were recruited who were not in the focus group.
- The interviews used a person-focused method that emphasized the perception of the Veterans' rather than their objective experiences.
- All of the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by two researchers, and each interview lasted up to one hour long.

## PARTICIPANTS

- This study consisted of eight Veterans who were between 28 and 47 years of age.
- Of the participants, six served in the Army, one in the Navy, and one in the Air Force.
- Participants were six males and two females, seven of the participants were White and one was Black.

## LIMITATIONS

- This study only interviewed eight Veterans and the sample size for this population is too small to make this study generalizable to the larger population.
- There was a wide age gap among some of the participants, which may mean differences between generation-based reintegration experiences and this was not accounted for in this study.
- All of the Veterans were served by and recruited from a single Polytrauma Network Site, which may have introduced bias in the recruitment and selection of the sample.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore the relationship between a traumatic injury and the ability to transitioning and integrating identities in the civilian world among Service members
- Examine the perceptions of role identity in community reintegration among Service members and their families
- Identify the factors that make transitioning to civilian life more difficult for some Service members while not increasing difficulties for other Service members

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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