

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Identity Adjustment Among Afghanistan and Iraq War Veterans With Reintegration Difficulty

Orazem, R. J., Frazier, P. A., Schnurr, P. P., Oleson, H. E., Litz, B. T., & Sayer, N. A. (2017). Identity adjustment among Afghanistan and Iraq war veterans with reintegration difficulty. *Psychological Trauma, 9*(1), 4-11. doi:10.1037/tra0000225

SUMMARY: Written data from a larger study were used to examine identity adjustment difficulties during reintegration among OIF/OEF/OND Veterans. Identity adjustment difficulties were examined based on gender and military component (i.e., Reserve or Guard, Active Duty). Both Active Duty and Reserve or Guard members reported reintegration difficulties, although these difficulties varied based on military component.

KEY FINDINGS:

- The majority of participants (65%) randomly selected for analysis wrote about at least one identity adjustment difficulty.
- Analysis of the written data identified five main themes: (1) Veterans felt like they didn't belong in the civilian world, (2) Veterans missed the structure and predictability of the military, (3) Veterans had negative views of civilians who lacked personal attributes valued in the military, (4) Veterans felt left behind by family and friends, and (5) Veterans had difficulty finding meaning or a purpose in civilian life.
- Compared to Veterans deployed from the Reserves or Guard, Veterans deployed from Active Duty were more likely to talk about feeling like they did not belong in the civilian world or lacked the skills needed for civilian life.
- Compared to Veterans deployed from Active Duty, Veterans deployed from the Reserve or Guard were more likely to write about their difficulty returning to their civilian identities because they missed important life events in friends and families lives while deployed.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide workshops that help Service members and their families prepare for reintegration and retirement role changes
- Continue to work with Service members to help them identify jobs in the civilian sector that utilize their unique skill sets and find employment outside of the military that provides a sense of purpose
- Tailor reintegration programs for Active Duty members and Reserve and Guard members to help reduce identity adjustment difficulties

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Continue to support programs that provide employment services for Service members retiring from the military
- Encourage the development and continuation of programs that help Service members and their families cope with role changes during reintegration and upon retirement from the military
- Encourage collaboration among DoD programs and community-based programs to support a smooth transition for Service members and their families during reintegration

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.



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METHODS

- Veterans were eligible to participate in an online randomized control trial if they expressed difficulty during reintegration, had valid contact information, had internet access, and did not screen positive for severe depression.
- A total of 404 participants submitted written text on up to four occasions about their reintegration difficulties.
- One hundred of the 404 writing samples were randomly selected for analysis for the current study.

PARTICIPANTS

- Among 100 participants who submitted a writing sample, 42% of participants were women, 62% were White, and the average age was 36.39 years.
- Sixty percent of participants had deployed from Active Duty, 36% from the Reserves or Guard, and 4% reported "other" pre-deployment military status.
- Sixty percent of participants served in the Army, 16% in the Air Force, 13% in the Navy, and 11% in the Marine Corps.
- Eighty-five percent of participants had been enlisted personnel and 18% had been officers or warrant officers.

LIMITATIONS

- Results were based on 500-word written responses that did not allow the researchers to ask clarifying questions or probe for more information.
- Data were taken from a larger study about reintegration difficulties and not adjustment difficulties specifically; therefore, it is inaccurate to conclude that those who did not write about adjustment difficulties did not experience them.
- The severity of adjustment difficulties was not assessed making it difficult to know how much these difficulties influenced Service members reintegration experiences.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore the severity of adjustment difficulties for Service members during reintegration
- Examine the effectiveness of programs that help Service members during reintegration and retirement from the military
- Gather data on the relationship between identity issues and psychological well-being of Service members during reintegration and following retirement

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