VETERANS IN THE LABOR MARKET: EXPERIENCES OF THE POST 9/11 GENERATION

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AUTHORS’ NOTE

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PARTNERSHIP

This project emerged from a partnership between the Chez Veterans Center’s Military Service Knowledge Collaborative (MSKC) at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, the Project for Middle Class Renewal at the School of Labor and Employment Relations at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (PMCR), and Jobpath, a non-for-profit employment-focused national Veteran Service Organization. The mission of the MSKC is to foster collaboration between researchers and Military/Veteran communities. A stakeholder from Jobpath contacted the MSKC with an idea to research the effectiveness of Veteran hiring fairs. A team was organized between the three partnering groups and collectively, the team designed and implemented this study. Veteran stakeholders were directly involved in the development of the study idea and questions asked in the survey, which is in line with the MSKC motto to “research with, not for” Veterans. The data from this report will be utilized by the partnering VSO, Jobpath, to inform their organizational development to best serve Military Veterans in their employment goals.
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Executive Summary

Veterans in the Labor Market: Experiences of a Post 9/11 Generation contains the results of a research project that emerged through a community partnership between the Chez Veterans Center’s (CVC) Military Service Knowledge Collaborative at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, the Project for Middle Class Renewal at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign’s School of Labor and Employment Relations, and Jobpath, a community Veteran service organization focused on helping Veterans advance their careers.

As the U.S. War on Terrorism enters its 20th year and the nation faces unprecedented unemployment levels as a result of the global Covid-19 pandemic, it is vital that the tools designed to assist transitioning Veterans in finding and obtaining civilian employment be examined for efficacy and improvement. Pre the pandemic, Veteran unemployment rates have been steadily improving since 2010. Among many other strategies implemented by both governmental and corporate stakeholders to improve employment readiness, recruitment, and retention among Veterans in the civilian labor market, Veteran job fairs has emerged as a primary tool. Given that much time and resources are allocated for Veteran hiring events and limited research examines this employment tool, a special component of this study was to examine the effectiveness of Veteran career fairs.

At large, this research study sought to understand Post-9/11 Veterans’ experiences in securing civilian work, as well as to paint a picture of current employment situations of Veterans and challenges they face in their transition to the civilian labor market. Particularly, this research analyzes the experiences of Veterans’ use of one prominent tool for job search and acquisition - job and hiring fairs organized by both public and private entities. Additionally, this research explores many factors influencing Veterans’ civilian work experiences including military rank, childcare responsibilities, disabilities, homelessness, military deployment experiences, and reliance on public assistance. The overarching aim of this study was to examine the employment experiences of Post-9/11 Veterans and the wide-ranging obstacles they face in seeking and securing long-term careers.

The results of the report are broken into three sections: 1) Veterans’ Civilian Work Experiences, 2) Veteran Job Fairs, and 3) Factors Influencing Veteran Employment. Veterans’ Civilian Work Experiences encompasses a participant overview, including the demographic and military experience differences of the 1,050 Post-9/11 Veterans who participated in a nationally conducted online survey. This section also examines a number of factors illuminating Veterans’ civilian work experiences: a) civilian employment status, b) job-seeking behaviors, c) opinions on technology platforms for job searching, d) occupational type, sector, and pay, and e) Veteran job satisfaction. The Veteran Job Fairs section explores respondents’ usage of career fairs to secure employment, including an in-depth examination of reasons given for dissatisfaction reported with this job search tool. The final section, Factors Influencing Veteran Employment, analyzes military-related factors impacting Veteran employment experiences such as rank and service-connected disability, as well as post-service factors such as childcare, homelessness and reliance on public assistance. The report concludes with lists of key recommendations. The notable findings from each major section of the report are outlined below:
A SNAPSHOT OF VETERANS’ CIVILIAN WORK EXPERIENCES

Data from this study paints a comprehensive picture of Veterans in the U.S. labor market.

- The majority (80%) of the Veterans sampled were currently employed at the time of taking our survey.
- In general, Veterans are satisfied with their employment. On a 1 (lowest) to 7 (highest) scale, 64% of respondents reported their job satisfaction to be higher than the mid-point of 4.
- Despite this high satisfaction, 55% of participants are currently looking for another job.
- To find those opportunities, Veterans use many different resources, with programs connected to the Veterans Health Administration being the top resource they rely on.
- Following the VA, Veterans also look to USA Jobs and non-for-profit Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) to seek employment.
- In terms of industry, the construction industry comprises the largest shares of Veterans in the labor market, followed by the finance and insurance sector, educational services, and lastly, information technology or media.
- By occupations or job title, Veterans largely work in average to high paying occupations that tend to require college degrees.
- One in five Veterans in our sample hold a management title and an additional 16.5% hold titles related to business, finance, computers, or mathematics.
- The majority of Veterans in this sample (70%) were paid hourly instead of salary.

VETERAN CAREER FAIRS ARE GENERALLY EFFECTIVE

Participants evaluated the effectiveness of Veteran career fairs in many dimensions.

- About 62% of Veteran respondents attended a Veteran job fair in the past year, and a vast majority (73.2%) of them attended one to three Veteran job fairs total.
- 67% of Veterans in this sample secured a job through Veteran job fairs.
- Those who attended job fairs reported overall satisfaction with Veteran-specific fairs (75%).
- 141 respondents (13.4%) reported dissatisfaction with Veteran job fairs and provided optional qualitative responses about what they did not like about their experience at job fairs. Six themes were generated from the responses to this question and paint an overall picture of why some Veterans are dissatisfied with hiring fairs:
  1. operational logistics of the fair
  2. misalignment between military skills, career goals, and civilian job offerings
  3. emphasis on low-wage and entry-level positions
  4. discrimination and lack of cultural sensitivity
  5. lack of earning a job as a result of the fair
  6. questioning intentions of companies at hiring fair
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SEVERAL FACTORS CREATE CHALLENGES FOR VETERAN EMPLOYMENT

Many factors influence Veterans’ civilian work experiences, including military rank, disabilities, homelessness, military deployment experiences, childcare responsibilities, and reliance on public assistance.

- Junior enlistees and warrant officers are more likely to receive an hourly wage while NCOs and officers are more likely to earn an annual salary.
- More than half of junior enlistees (51.1%) and warrant officers (53.6%) reported they were currently looking for a job compared to only 37.5% of NCOs and 36.9% of commissioned officers.
- Almost half (46.9%) of Veteran participants reported a service-connected disability.
- Most (78.2%) Veterans with a disability believe their service-related disability is a barrier to finding employment.
- Of Veterans who reported a disability, more reported a psychological disability than a physical disability.
- Many Veterans in this sample reported experiencing homelessness in the past year.
- Combat exposure, PTSD, and homelessness all inter-connectively create barriers to Veterans’ successful transition to the civilian labor market.
- The more children a Veteran has at home, the more likely he/she is to be paid by hourly wage rather than salary.
- 43.7% of the sample reported that they rely on any sort of public assistance.

Data from this study revealed several key areas that warrant recommendation for action. First, when it comes to Veterans’ civilian work experiences, most are satisfied, about half are looking for another job, most rely on Veteran-focused search platforms when looking for work, and generally, Veterans are satisfied with their jobs. Next, this study revealed that Veterans who attend Veteran-specific job fairs are satisfied and are likely to earn employment as a result. However, deeper exploration into qualitative revealed many areas for improvement for institutions and organizations hosting Veteran job fairs. Finally, data from this study illuminated several factors influencing Veteran’s experiences in the civilian labor market, including childcare, disability, homelessness, deployment experience, and reliance on public assistance. A critical finding in this data highlights the impact military rank has on civilian employment factors like income type and job satisfaction. Junior enlisted and warrant officers may benefit from more systemic support while transitioning to the civilian labor market. In order to translate our data into solutions, the final section of the report contains key recommendations for 1) employers looking to recruit and retain Veterans in their workforce, 2) policymakers working to aid Veterans in their transition to civilian employment, 3) organizations and institutions hosting Veteran job fairs, and 3) Veterans looking to improve their readiness in the civilian job market.
Introduction and Background

“No Veteran who fought for our nation should have to fight for a job when they come home.” – President Barack Obama, November 2011 (Curry Hall, et al 2014, 1).

The arguments for civilian hiring of post-9/11 Veterans are wide-ranging and compelling. A 2013 Center for New American Security report outlines the business case for hiring U.S. military Veterans, arguing that firms would benefit from their adaptive skill sets, strong work ethics and capacity to work well under stressful conditions (Caldwell and Burke, 2013). The skills and experiences acquired through military service are valuable in civilian life. Beyond development of technical agility in fields such as medicine, communications, maintenance and information technology, all service members learn the essential skills of teamwork, management, leadership and discipline from the onset of their basic training. These qualities have been especially vital in complex operating environments like Afghanistan, where leaders need consensus-building abilities to work effectively with troops from other services and allied nations, as well as representatives from assorted government and nongovernment agencies. Importantly, these qualities and skills continue to develop over time given the diverse and often difficult situations and operational environments they confront, especially in combat arenas. Officers, in particular, “may be expected to serve as teachers, physical fitness advisers, counselors, mentors, mechanics or operations managers – and, of course, always as leaders” (6).

While Veterans transfer many of their military service skills and experiences to civilian life, Post-9/11 Veterans and their advocates consistently point to the mainstream media’s often negative framing of their identity. A 2015 paper on the coverage of Veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in the U.S. media found that the media paints Veterans as “damaged” by their time spent in the military but worthy of assistance provided from federal programs and government benefits (Kleykamp and Hipes 2015, 348). This analysis of 151 articles from the New York Times and Washington Post between 2003-2011 finds a media narrative portraying Veterans as positive contributors to society either because of or despite their physical and/or mental injuries and illness resulting from their service. Media stories have implicated Post-9/11 Veterans in violent crimes and have “generated coverage that implicitly and explicitly links military service in general – and combat exposure in particular – to a number of negative outcomes, namely mental health problems such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, substance abuse, and suicide” (348). For Veterans and their supporters, this media coverage “construct[s] and perpetuate[s] images of veterans as ‘broken’ individuals at best, and crazy or dangerous at worst” (348; Jordan, 2012). Not surprisingly, many civilians hold distinct stereotypes about combat-exposed Veterans, many of which are related to physical or psychological problems (McLean and Kleykamp, 2014). In August 2019, 41% of Post-9/11 Veterans had a service-connected disability, compared with 25% of all veterans (BLS, 2020).

As of 2019, there were 4.3 million Veterans who had served during Gulf War-era II/Post-9/11-era (September 2001 to present). 17% of these Veterans were women, compared with 3.5% of Veterans from World War II,
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

the Korean War, and the Vietnam era. About two-thirds of all Post-9/11 Veterans are between the ages of 25 and 44. The most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) pre-Covid-19 pandemic unemployment rate for male Post-9/11 Veterans, at 3.4%, was little different from the rate for male nonveterans, at 3.7% (BLS, 2020). Despite recent declines, the high unemployment rate of Post-9/11 young Veterans in the early 2010’s (30% unemployment rate for Veterans age 18-24 in 2011) has drawn extensive public attention (BLS, 2012).

Public and employer perceptions as well as difficulties translating military skills into civilian job duties are only two of several factors that have historically been cited as cause for higher unemployment rates amongst Veterans when compared to the nonveteran population. In their 2012 survey of American employers, Harrell and Berglass discern challenges perceived by employers in association with hiring Veterans, particularly in relation to difficulties translating military experiences to civilian workplaces as well as concerns around future deployments of the National Guard members and reservists (Harrell and Berglass, 2012). Indeed, some employers hold negative stereotypes of Veterans and maintain concerns about the “effects of combat stress, including post-traumatic stress issues, anger management and tendencies towards violence” (Harrell and Berglass, 2012, 6). In addition, while some companies target Veterans for employment because of their experiences with disciplined organizational structures, other firms complain of Veterans’ “rigidity” (6).

Another employer perception of Veterans relates to acclimation, as some companies believe discharged Veterans need additional time post-deployment to acclimate to civilian life. Other employers report their struggles in locating Veterans for hire, and that the vast network of Internet resources and organizations aimed at connecting Veterans and employers is unwieldy and “confusing” (6). Recent research shows that both Veterans and companies maintain issues locating each other (Schafer et al, 2016). Some Veterans have problems finding small and midsize companies with Veteran-focused hiring programs, especially at the local level. Similarly, research indicates that firms report challenges finding Veteran recruits transitioning to civilian employment due to Department of Defense policies barring disclosure of service members’ names as well as their infrequent partnerships with private sector programs that assist in training and preparing Veterans for employment (Schafer et al, 2016, 14).

Differences in job searching patterns among Veterans and nonveterans are also reflected in the amount of time each takes to apply for unemployment benefits. Heaton et al. (2018) examine the job search strategies between the two populations and find key differences with how the unemployment compensation programs operate for both. Veterans experience longer wait times to receive Unemployment Compensation for Ex-Service Members (UCX) as compared to unemployed civilians seeking assistance from state-run Unemployment Insurance (UI) programs. Upon securing employment, Veterans have been found to be more amenable to accepting lower wages than their civilian counterparts and are more likely to be enrolled in vocational training programs for reskilling (Heaton et al., 2018).

Despite these differences, recent studies of Post-9/11 Veterans generally find that military service positively influences Veterans’ earnings (Brown and Routon, 2016; Kleykamp, 2013; Routon, 2014). Harrell and Berglass’s national employer survey finds a majority of companies see a number of specific business reasons to hire Veterans, especially related to their perceived value of Veterans’ leadership experience (Harrell and Berglass,
Kleykamp (2013) examines educational attainment among Veterans and finds that unemployment rates vary by educational level. However, these differences are not statistically significant when controlled for demographics.

Across the board, Veterans earn a 5 to 10% hourly pay premium when compared to civilians (Kleykamp, 2013). It is important to note that not all Post-9/11 Veterans experience this same level of earnings premium. Specifically, this premium lowers with higher educational attainment, especially for Veterans with some college education or those who possess a bachelor’s degree. When compared to Veterans with high school diplomas or less than a high school degree, the earnings premiums for Veterans that are college graduates is effectively erased (Kleykamp, 2013). Results from Kleykamp’s 2013 study suggest that less educated Veterans benefit most from leveraging the skills they acquired in the military occupations they performed. These findings suggest that Veterans can achieve positive benefits when military-civilian occupational skill sets match and that less educated Veterans are the greatest benefactors of this impact.

As the U.S. War on Terrorism enters its 20th year and the nation faces unprecedented unemployment levels as a result of the global Covid-19 pandemic, it is vital that the tools designed to assist transitioning Veterans in finding and obtaining civilian employment be examined for efficacy and improvement. This report seeks to understand Post-9/11 Veterans’ experience in securing civilian work, as well as discern current employment situations of Veterans and challenges they face in their transition to the civilian labor market. Of note, this research analyzes the experience of Veterans’ use of one prominent tool for job search and acquisition - job and hiring fairs organized by both public and private entities. As a tool for finding employment and labor, job fairs are widely used to connect employers with both Veteran and nonveteran job seekers. Additionally, this study explores many factors influencing Veterans’ civilian work experiences including childcare responsibilities, disabilities, homelessness, military deployment experiences, and reliance on public assistance. The overarching aim of this study is to examine the employment experiences of Post-9/11 Veterans and the wide-ranging obstacles they face in seeking and securing long-term careers.
Report Overview

This report begins with a participant overview, including the demographic and military experience differences of the 1,050 Post-9/11 Veterans who participated in a nationally conducted online survey. Next, the report examines a number of factors illuminating Veterans’ civilian work experiences, including a) civilian employment status, b) job-seeking, c) technology platforms for job searching, d) occupational type, sector, and pay, and e) Veteran job satisfaction. A special focus of this study examines the varied job search strategies employed by Veterans to secure civilian employment, particularly their attendance of job fairs. Thus, the next section explores respondents’ usage of career fairs to secure employment, including an in-depth examination of reasons given for the preponderance of dissatisfaction reported with this job search tool. The final sections analyze military-related factors impacting Veteran employment experiences such as rank and service-connected disability, as well as post-service factors such as childcare, homelessness and reliance on public assistance. Finally, the report concludes with a list of recommendations in an attempt to alleviate identified problem areas; limitations and directions for future research are also discussed.
Methods

MATERIALS

Qualtrics XM, a commercial survey sampling and administration company was contracted to recruit participants and implement an internet-based survey. Samples were acquired from existing pools of research panel participants who have agreed to be contacted for research studies. The Qualtrics XM network of participant pools, referred to as the Marketplace, consist of hundreds of suppliers with a diverse set of recruitment methodologies. The compilation of sampling sources helps to ensure the overall sampling frame is not overly reliant or dependent on any particular demographic or segment of the population unless requested by researchers. For example, as women Veteran are an underrepresented group, for this study investigators requested a sample size of approximately 50% male and approximately 50% female Veteran respondents. Respondents can be sourced from a variety of methods depending on the individual supply partner, including the following: ads and promotions across various digital networks, word of mouth and membership referrals, social networks, online and mobile games, affiliate marketing, banner ads, TV and radio ads, and offline mail-based recruitment campaigns.

Recruitment targeted potential survey respondents who were likely to qualify based on the demographic characteristics reported in their user profiles (e.g., military status). Panelists were invited to participate and opted in by activating a survey link directing them to the study consent page and survey instrument. Ineligible respondents were immediately exited from the survey upon providing a response that did not meet inclusion criteria or exceeded set quotas (i.e., a priori quotas for responses to serving in the military since Post/911 met).

To ensure data quality, surveys featured (1) attention checks (i.e., survey items that instructed respondents to provide a specific response); and (2) speeding checks (i.e., respondents with survey duration of < one-third of the median duration of survey). Respondents who failed either quality check were excluded from the final samples. Qualtrics compensated participants $4.00 for each completed survey response. The data reported in this study was collected according to separate Institutional Review Board (IRB# 19591)-approved protocols and in accordance with recognized ethical guidelines. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant.
STUDY DESIGN AND SURVEY ADMINISTRATION

The sample was obtained as part of an online survey designed to examine the civilian work experiences of a Post/911 military-connected cohort. To be eligible to participate in the survey, the military service member or Veteran participants must have served in the U.S. Armed Forces Post-9/11 or currently be serving in the U.S. Armed Forces and be physically able to take the survey in the United States, resulting in 1,050 Veterans in our sample. The Veteran survey, conducted for one month between October 15, 2019 through November 13, 2019, contained 55 items and took approximately 7-8 minutes for each participant to complete. The survey explored basic demographics such as age, gender, ethnicity, country of birth, region, education level, branch of service, if currently serving, number of deployments, Military Occupation Specialty (MOS), rank, and years since separation. Further, the survey investigated the efficacy of job fairs for a Post-9/11 military-connected cohort, potential job-related discrimination, types of employment and industries hiring Post 9/11 Veterans or military personnel and the use of technology in finding and securing employment.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

All data analyses were conducted by using Stata Version 16 on data collected in Qualtrics. The aim of the report is to describe the current employment situations of Veterans and challenges Veterans face in their transition to the civilian labor market. So, most of the analyses are descriptive statistics. However, the analyses also include cross tabs with chi-square, Ordinary Least Square regressions, and Logistic regressions in order to examine what factors are associated with outcome variables.

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

This survey included two open-ended questions that resulted in qualitative data. Two qualitative data experts on the research team analyzed this data by coding and analyzing recurrent themes using a grounded theory with a thematic analysis approach (Chapman, Hadfield, and Chapman, 2015). Researchers used an inductive process to understand respondent’s qualitative responses by first reviewing and reading whole transcripts to develop a familiarity with the text and search for patterns and themes that frequently occur throughout the responses. Next, team members separately conducted initial coding of recurrent themes to generate a preliminary set of working domain codes. Researchers then met to compare and merge initial codes, compare analyses, and discuss discrepancies. Finally, researchers recoded the entire data set with agreed upon themes once more individually then again collectively to resolve any discrepancies in the second round of individual coding. Data was coded by identifying responses exemplifying key concepts or ideas related to the codes. Key excerpts were identified for each code to exemplify that thematic finding in the data.
Results

VETERANS’ CIVILIAN WORK EXPERIENCES

A multitude of factors influence Veterans’ experiences in the civilian labor market. This section begins with an overview of participants, including both demographics and military experience. Following this is an assessment of Veterans’ civilian employment status, exploration of their job-seeking platforms, and overview of their occupational type, sector, and pay. This section concludes with an analysis of Veteran job satisfaction.

Participant Overview

As of 2019, there were 4.3 million Veterans who had served during Gulf War-era II/Post-9/11-era (September 2001 to present). As an end date to the Post-9/11 has not been established, the Post-9/11 cohort will continue to grow. Figure 1 displays demographic information of the sample of respondents who participated in this research. Of the 1,050 Veterans surveyed, roughly 55% were male and over two-thirds were between the ages of 18 and 39 at the time the survey was conducted. Nationally, about 17% of Post-9/11 Veterans are female and is White (60.9%), followed by African American (21.6%).

The sample of surveyed workers are considerably educated, when compared to the overall population of post-9/11 Veterans. More than 81% have some college education and a little more than half of the sample have a bachelor’s degree or higher. The overwhelming majority (93.9%) were born in the United States, with 21.1% being from the northeast, 18.2% from the Midwest, 22.3% from the western U.S. and 37.5% from the south.

Military experience among surveyed respondents aligns closely with breakdowns of active-duty personnel by service in 2018 (CFR, 2020). Roughly 44% of the sample serve or served in the U.S. Army, 21% in the Navy, 17% in the Air Force, 12% in the Marine Corps and 6% in the Coast Guard. This is compared to 2018 figures of active duty personnel which include 35% enlisted in the Army, 24% in the Navy, 24% in the Air Force, 14% in the Marine Corps and 3% in the Coast Guard. Less than 13% of respondents were never deployed for service overseas, while 43% were deployed three or more times.

A U.S. military occupation code (MOS code), is a nine-character code used in the Army and Marine Corps to identify a specific job. The Air Force, Navy and Coast Guard also use distinct systems of codes, ratings and designators to determine jobs. Among surveyed Veterans, approximately 33.5% held combat MOS jobs, 40.5% held non-combat MOS jobs, and a little less than 20% held both combat and non-combat jobs. As can be

In error, researchers failed to include “Latino/Hispanic race as an option, which caused this demographic in our sample to be underrepresented. About 6% wrote in/self-identified as Latino, “mixed race” or “mixed identity. Altogether, these make up 5.7% of the sample. Further, participants could check more than one box for “race”, so the total adds up to more than 100%.
seen in Figure 2, 41.7% of respondents received the highest rank of junior enlistee in the U.S. Armed Forces, while 37% served as Non-Commissioned Officers, 9.2% served as Warrant Officers, and 9.8% held Officer ranks. At the time this survey was conducted, over one-third of respondents (35.8%) had three or less years of separation from military duty, while just under one-third of the sample (31.8%) had between three and nine years of separation and a slightly less than 20% had ten or more years of separation from the military when taking this survey.

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**FIGURE 1.** Demographics of Veteran Participants
FIGURE 2. Military Backgrounds of Veteran Participants

Civilian Employment Status

Finding a good job is one of the most critical challenges that Veterans face in their transition to civilian society. The most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) pre-Covid-19 pandemic unemployment rate for male Post-9/11 Veterans, at 3.4%, was little different from the rate for male nonveterans, at 3.7% (BLS, 2020). Among men ages 25 to 34, Post-9/11 Veterans had a lower unemployment rate (3.1%) than did nonveterans (3.8%). Among
men ages 35 to 44, however, Post-9/11 Veterans had a higher unemployment rate (3.6%) than did nonveterans (2.5%). The unemployment rate for female Post-9/11 Veterans was 4.7% in 2019, higher than the rate for female nonveterans (3.5%). By age, unemployment rates for female Post-9/11 Veterans and nonveterans were not statistically different, with one exception: 35 to 44-year-old female Post-9/11 Veterans had a rate of 5.0% higher than the rate of 2.9% for their nonveteran counterparts. As of 2019, employed Post-9/11 Veterans were about twice as likely to work in the public sector in 2019 as employed nonveterans—25% and 13%, respectively. Among the employed, 15% of Post-9/11 Veterans worked for the federal government, compared with 2% of nonveterans.

This study began by assessing the current civilian employment status of participants. The majority (80%) of the Veterans sampled were currently employed at the time of taking our survey (Figure 3). A similar proportion (82%) of the sample reported that they have held a civilian job since separation from the military service (Figure 4). About 30% have held two jobs so far, 17% either had only one job or three jobs (Figure 5). A smaller number of Veterans had more than three jobs since separation. It is not surprising that the number of civilian jobs held increases with the years since separation but is associated with age weakly.
Job-Seeking

Veterans used a variety of resources to find a job (Figure 6). Among these, the most frequently used resources are programs connected to the Department of Veterans Affairs (42%). Following this is USA Jobs (30.9%), non-profit organizations that support veterans like USO and Hiring our Heroes (30.5%), and personal networks like friends and family (25.0%). Programs connected with community colleges or other higher education institutions (23.9%) are slightly less frequently used than resources specifically designed for Veterans. Similarly, fewer Veterans tend to use general resources, such as job boards like Indeed and ZipRecruiter (20.4%), LinkedIn or other employment-related social networking websites (19.6%), and American Job Centers or other workforce development/job training organizations (14.3%). This may be because Veterans are more exposed to Veteran-related institutions than others or because Veterans believe resources by Veteran-related institutions are more effective than job search resources for the general public.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Programs(s) connected to the VA hospitals/clinics</td>
<td>42.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA Jobs</td>
<td>30.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit organizations that support veterans</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends/Family</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs connected with community college or...</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job boards like Indeed, ZipRecruiter,...</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn or other employment-related social...</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Job Centers or other workforce...</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I haven't looked for work</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FIGURE 6.** Resources Used to Look for Civilian Work (%, multiple)

Technology Platforms for Job Searching

Veterans reported high expectations on technology platforms for aiding their employment searches. The majority (76%) of Veterans expect that tech platform for Veterans will help their job search. Veterans consider the matching of their military skills with civilian job skills is the most important need for technology platforms to help with (average 4.17 point in a 1 to 5 scale), followed by resume writing, taking online courses, access to new jobs, mentoring, and military to civilian transition information (4.04). However, the difference in the importance is not huge and Veterans consider all five functions of potential tech platforms to be important.
RESULTS

FIGURE 7. Value of Varied Tech Platform Programs (1-5 Scale)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance or Insurance</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational services</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information technology or media</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public administration</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care services, except hospitals</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment, arts or recreation</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food services and drinking places</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail trade</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation or warehousing</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary help, staffing or employment agency</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services-professional or technical support</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitals</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale trade</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services-personal care, repair/maintenance, car/household</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real estate or rental/leasing services</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services-commercial</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining or Agriculture</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality/Accommodation</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social assistance or membership groups</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t Know</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 8. Industries of Employed Veteran Participants
RESULTS

VETERANS IN THE LABOR MARKET: EXPERIENCES OF THE POST 9/11 GENERATION

Occupational Type, Sector, and Pay

The largest share of the currently employed Veterans in this sample work in construction industry (15.2%), followed by finance/insurance (7.0%), educational services (6.9%), and information technology or media (6.2%). Conversely, Veterans are employed the least in social assistance or membership groups (0.9%), hospitality/accommodation (1.0%), mining or agriculture (1.1%), and service (commercial) industries (1.1%).

By occupation, a large fraction of Veterans in this sample work in relatively high paying occupations that typically require a college degree. About one in five Veterans (19.0%) are employed in management occupations, followed by business and financial operations occupations (9.3%) and computer and mathematical occupations (7.2%). On the other hand, Veterans tend to be employed less in low-paying, less education-required occupations: personal care and service occupations (0.3%), farming, fishing, and forestry (0.7%), building and grounds cleaning/maintenance (1.0%), and production (1.4%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation/Job Title</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and Financial Operations</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer and Mathematical</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Specific</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation and Material Moving</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture and Engineering</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office and Administrative Support</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life, Physical, and Social Science</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales and Related</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Preparation and Serving Related</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Instruction and Library</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare Support</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure/Other</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community and Social Service</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protective Service</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction and Extraction</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Installation, Maintenance, and Repair</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare Practitioners and Technical</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building and Grounds Cleaning/Maintenance</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farming, Fishing, and Forestry</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Care and Service</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 9. Occupation/Job Title of Employed Veteran Participants
The majority of Veterans in this sample are employed in mid to large firms with more than 50 employees. About 30.0% of Veterans work in firms with 50 employees or fewer while 47.0% are employed in larger firms. It may be because larger firms are more likely to have resources to allocate for Veteran hiring initiatives and/or particular employment resources for Veteran employee.

Pay type is an important indicator of stability of employment and income. Annual salary is often for jobs that require higher education and long-term commitment while hourly wage is frequent in jobs for unpredictable work shifts or part-time employment. Despite our previous finding that many Veterans have jobs with titles in management, business and financial operations, and computer and mathematical occupations (see Figure 9), the majority (70%) of the currently employed Veterans in this sample are paid by an hourly wage, with only 30% receiving an annual salary. By the highest rank, Junior Enlistees and Warrant Officer are more likely to receive an hourly wage while NCOs and Officers are more likely to receive an annual salary, of which
Veteran Job Satisfaction

Veterans tend to be satisfied by their current employment. On a 1 (lowest) to 7 (highest) Likert scale, 64% of the sample indicated their job satisfaction level higher than the mid-point of 4.

Nonetheless, 55% of the Veterans sampled are currently looking for another job. About one in five Veterans (18.4%) have been looking for a job for three to four months and fewer Veterans for longer periods (five to six months or more). The highest number of jobs Veterans applied for is one to three jobs (24.6%), followed by four to seven jobs (21.3%), and eight to ten jobs (14.3%). Although fewer Veterans have applied for a larger number of jobs, 8.9% of Veterans in our sample have applied for more than 20 jobs, suggesting that they struggle in finding a job they want.

The proportion of Veterans who are currently looking for a job are different across the ranks at the time of separation. More than half of warrant officer Veterans (53.6%) and junior enlisted Veterans (51.1%) reported that they are looking for a job whereas only 37.5% of NCOs and 36.9% of officers are currently looking for a job. It may indicate that junior enlisted and warrant officer Veterans are less likely than NCO and officer Veterans to have found a job that fits their skills and expectations. Given our previous finding that junior enlists and warrant officers are more likely to receive hourly wages opposed to NCOs and officers being more likely to earn salaries, this could account for why more of the former are looking for a job.

FIGURE 13. Job Satisfaction (1=Lowest, 7=Highest)

FIGURE 14. Currently Looking for Job
RESULTS

FIGURE 15. Duration of Respondents' Job Search

FIGURE 16. Number of Jobs Applied
As 55% of respondents reported currently searching for employment, many provided additional insight on why they feel they have not found the right job yet. Respondents selected as many answers they wanted out of 15 answer choices, with an option to choose “other” and write in a response. The only response to emerge in the “other” category that was not already encompassed in the provided answer choices was “disability.” Most Veterans who are currently looking for a job felt they haven’t found one primarily due to 1) pay/compensation not being sufficient, 2) location, 3) not enough job openings/too many people applying, and 4) scheduling problems. Whereas these issues are not specific to only the Veteran population (apart from insufficient pay being heighted among junior enlisting and warrant officers), Figure 18 highlights the barriers to securing employment that are specific to Veterans. The grey shading is Veteran specific, and the blue shading is generalizable outside of the Veteran population. Specifically, participants reporting the following Military/Veteran-related barriers to finding employment: (1) employers are concerned about military past, (2) competing with job candidates who have been in the workforce longer, (3) explaining how military skills translate to the civilian job requirement, (4) employers concerned with potential future military obligations, (5) employers not understanding Veteran identity and experiences, (6) lacking the required skills or civilian certifications for the job, (7) lacking the required education for the job, (8) employers avoiding hiring Veterans, (9) employers not believing Veterans have adequate skills, and (10) service-connected disabilities.
In summary, at the time of taking this survey, most Veteran participants had civilian employment and reported overall job satisfaction. Though data showed Veterans generally tend to be satisfied with their jobs, difference among ranks raise concerns, as does the finding that Veterans are most likely to earn an hourly wage as opposed to salary. Further, despite the finding that most Veteran respondents have jobs they are satisfied with, nonetheless, many were searching for another job, using platforms specifically designed for Veteran users. The following section dives deeper into a job-searching tool often employed to recruit Veterans into the civilian workforce.

**VETERAN JOB FAIRS**

A key component of this study was to determine the value of Veteran-focusing hiring or career fairs. About 62% of Veterans in our sample attended a Veteran job fair in the past year, and a vast majority (73.2%) of them attended one to three Veteran job fairs total. Veterans in this sample indicated that Veteran job fairs are effective in many dimensions. Those who attended job fairs reported that overall, they are satisfied with job fairs (75%), with a relatively high satisfaction level (51.1% reported that they were extremely satisfied). Of note, about 67% of Veterans secured a job through Veteran job fairs. We also found considerable differences in attendance rates of Veteran job fairs across rank. While relatively large proportions of warrant officers (75.8%), commissioned officers (64.1%), and junior enlistees (63.8%) attended job fairs, only 57.1% of NCO Veterans ever attended job fairs. Similarly, the average number of job fairs attended is lowest for NCO Veterans (2.5). Nonetheless, no difference in satisfaction level for job fairs is found across ranks.
FIGURE 19. Attended Veteran Career Fair Last Year

FIGURE 20. Number of Job Fairs Attended

FIGURE 21. Secured Job from Job Fair
RESULTS

Deeper Insight: Dissatisfaction with Job Fairs

To gain deeper insight into the experiences of Veterans attending hiring/career fairs and to best understand their lived experiences, researchers included an open-ended question for respondents who indicated low satisfaction with job fairs. Prompted to reflect on their most recently attended job fair, the question asked, “What didn’t you like about your experience at the Veteran hiring or career fair?” Though these results are not representative of our whole sample, 141 respondents (13.4%) provided optional qualitative responses, allowing insight into how a small sample of respondents feel about Veteran job fairs. Six themes were generated from the responses to this question and paint an overall picture of why some Veterans are dissatisfied with hiring fairs. Of note, several of the responses could be coded in multiple themes. The themes include: 1) operational logistics of the fair, 2) misalignment between military skills, career goals, and civilian job offerings, 3) emphasis on low-wage and entry-level positions, 4) discrimination and lack of cultural sensitivity, 5) lack of earning a job as a result of the fair, 6) questioning intentions of companies at hiring fair.

FIGURE 22. Respondent’s Overall Satisfaction with Job Fairs (1-5 Scale)

FIGURE 23. Job Fair Attendance and Average Number of Attendance by Rank

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Junior Enlistee</th>
<th>NCO</th>
<th>Warrant Officer</th>
<th>Officer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attended Job Fair</td>
<td>63.8%</td>
<td>57.1%</td>
<td>75.8%</td>
<td>64.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Number of Attendance</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Operational Logistics of the Fair.**

Many Veterans (35.5%) reported a dissatisfaction with overall organization and logistics of the job fair they last attended, making this the largest theme. Participants used words like, “confusing,” “disorganized,” and “too many people,” in their responses to this question. Veterans felt job fairs were overcrowded and did not offer enough one-on-one time or support. Additionally, included in this theme is a lack of variety in companies present and positions advertised at the fairs. For example, one Veteran noted, “From my experience I have not seen much participation. Most of the time I have seen the same companies offer the same kind of jobs.” Though Veterans are accustomed to the military institution, which is not only mission and action-oriented, but also entails high levels of organization and attention to detail, this theme of dissatisfaction due to operational logistics of the fair is not necessarily unique to Veterans.

**Misalignment between Military Skills, Career Goals, and Civilian Job Offerings.**

The second largest theme represents a misalignment between military skills, career goals, and civilian job offerings (27.7%). Some Veterans expressed dissatisfaction in civilian job offerings not aligning with their career goals, represented with comments such as “not many jobs in my field,” **“not enough employers that fit my career objectives,”** and “it was mostly stereotypical jobs.” Other comments seemed to focus more on a mismatch between military skills and experiences and what they believe prospective employers are looking for, reified by comments such as: a) “They don’t have jobs that pair enough in line with my expertise,” b) **“Most vendors are looking for experience beyond what was acquired in the military,”** c) “They was looking for people fresh out not guys who were out longer than 2 years,” and d) **“Most of the career fairs I attended when I first transitioned seemed to be geared towards more junior military members.”**

**Emphasis on Low-Wage and Entry-Level Positions.**

A smaller portion of this subgroup of Veteran respondents (12.8%) reported a concern that some employers at Veteran job fairs focus solely on recruiting low-wage workers and offering entry-level positions. One Veteran explicated the emphasis on entry-level positions, “I served for 20 years in leadership roles. Job fairs typically expect to hire veterans who will not be leaders, are not skilled in a function that they are looking for, and will come in at an entry level position. I knew I might not make what I earned in the military, but I didn’t want to earn $15/hr.” Another Veteran expressed this belief with the comment, **“all the career fairs I went to for the past years have been employers mostly looking for Veterans for sale and really low qualified jobs.”** Finally, some Veterans noted how lack of cultural understanding of military experiences may influence employers to recruit Veterans for low quality jobs, “They just do not understand the experience levels that senior NCOs have and bring to the table. Aside of the degree obstacle, it is clear that these companies are looking for cheap labor in exchange for the service man’s dedication and not to question authority as well as to start them at a salary as low as possible.”

**Discrimination and Lack of Cultural Sensitivity.**

A small group of Veterans who provided qualitative responses (12.1%) felt that they were explicitly discriminated against at these hiring fairs, that employers lacked a cultural nuance or sensitivity to their
RESULTS

Veteran identity, or that the fairs lacked jobs for Veterans with disabilities. Some Veterans, though not providing elaborations, reported discrimination with comments such as “some people were racist,” and, “I disliked how I was discriminated [against].” Others noted, “Some people were rude,” and “They acted really weird with me.” Some Veterans reported discrimination based on their Veteran identity and military experience. Examples include, “I think there’s discrimination in the hiring process. Veteran commission officers are prioritized [more] than the enlisted Veterans,” “I do not believe that employers think that a Veteran can be educated,” “These fairs assume that the majority of Vets they speak with don’t have education or purpose outside of anything except for their MOS’s,” and “some people come to make fun of Veterans.” These comments reflect a lack of cultural understanding and competency related to Veteran identity and impact how employers both engage with and employ Veterans. Finally, many Veterans reported dissatisfaction with job fairs due to a lack of job offerings for Veterans with disabilities. One Veteran noted, “I received a lot of great information but it wasn’t relevant to me in particular. Due to various disabilities I am limited on the type of employment I can take and the companies weren’t offering any positions that I was able to do.”

Lack of Earning a Job as a Result of the Fair.

Dissatisfaction of not securing a job as a result of the career fair emerged as another theme (12.1%). Many Veterans commented that “I didn’t find a job that I felt comfortable with or that I liked,” and “didn’t gain employment as a result of the fair.” Another noted dissatisfaction with lack of timely hiring and immediately available jobs at the fairs, “Hiring events/fairs are not that, they are nothing but a visual representation of a company’s job posting page. If you are wanting to hire Veterans, then you have to have the jobs you can fill on the spot. Anything less, we might as well go to their website and save the gas and time.” Again, given the military is a mission and action-oriented institution, Veterans could have expectations of “action” when attending hiring fairs, which could lead to dissatisfaction if a direct action, like securing a job, doesn’t result from the fair.

Questioning Intentions of Companies at Hiring Fair.

The smallest theme to emerge in this qualitative dataset represents Veterans (6.4%) who questioned or raised suspicions of the intentionality of employers attending Veteran hiring fairs. One Veteran reported, “The same employers reps at every job fair just selling the same old routine ‘we love the vets and want to hire’. But not once did I ever get a call or email for an interview or any disposition. And I’m not alone; the same vets I see at these events all feel the same.” Additional comments include, “the companies only attend the fairs as a marketing and a sales gimmick and/or are looking for low wage workers” and “Companies and vendors didn’t seem as they wanted to hire veterans, but instead wanted to have a day away from the office or exposure for their location.” This theme represents responses that reify frustration for not receiving correspondence from prospective employers, dissatisfaction with lack of diversity in employers, beliefs that organizations in attendance are only there in search of low-wage workers, and suspicions of organizations attending Veteran specific fairs as a way to market or gain exposure for their organization.
Overall, Veteran-focused hiring events seem to be worthwhile. Veterans were generally satisfied with the fairs they had attended, and many secured a job as a result of a fair. The small fraction of Veterans who reported dissatisfaction with job fairs provided rich insight into why, which allowed researchers to construct a list of key recommendations for future organizations and institutions hosting Veteran career fairs. Before providing recommendations for action however, the final portion of this report examines factors influencing Veteran employment. This next section focuses on additional and unique military-specific factors that influence Veterans’ experiences in the civilian labor market and examines child care, disability, homelessness, deployment experiences, and reliance on public assistance. Following this is a conclusion outlining key recommendations for improving Veterans experiences in the civilian labor market.

**FACTORS INFLUENCING VETERAN EMPLOYMENT**

**Child Care**

Care responsibility is often identified as an obstacle to working full-time, which is true for this sample as well. The majority of the Veteran respondents (59.6%) do not have children living with them. Among those who have children, most Veterans have one (44.8%) or two children (35.2%) living at home with them. A vast majority of Veterans (88%) with children receive a partner’s assistance with childcare responsibilities. However, the number of children living together is closely associated with the pay type. Figure 24 shows that the more children at home the more likely to be paid by hourly wage. Logistic regression controlling for education and age shows that the association is statistically significant at p<.05. This implies that, like for non-veterans, care responsibility likely hinders Veterans’ full-time employment or ability to earn more stable, salary-based employment.

![FIGURE 24. Earning Hourly Wage by Number of Dependent Children](image_url)
Disability

Many Veterans are exposed to physical and psychological injuries during military service, which can become barriers to finding civilian employment. About a half (46.9%) of the sample reported a service-related disability. A vast majority (78.2%) of Veterans with a disability think their service-related disability causes barriers to finding work. The largest fraction (26.6%) reported their disability rating is 50 to 60% and the smallest is 80 to 90%. Veterans reported physical disabilities (20%), recovering from injury (17.5%), PTSD (15.4%), and other psychological stress (6.9%). Further, MOS is associated with the rate of PTSD with Veterans holding a combat specific MOS only (15.3%). Additionally, Veterans of both combat and non-combat MOS’ (17.5%) experience PTSD at higher rates than Veterans with a non-combat MOS only (14.1%). Job satisfaction level is not much different between Veterans with PTSD (5.9) and Veterans without PTSD (6.1).
Results

Figure 28. Disability Type

Figure 29. PTSD by MOS

Figure 30. Job Satisfaction (1=Lowest: 7=Highest) by PTSD

Veterans in the Labor Market: Experiences of the Post 9/11 Generation
Homelessness

Homelessness is one of the critical challenges that some Veterans face, often because of service-related physical and psychological injuries like mental illness. Homelessness also may be an indicator of failing to find a job that can support Veterans’ housing cost. Homelessness is also a very transient experience. A fairly large proportion (33.8%) of this sample reported they had experienced homelessness in the past year for a short or long period. About half (47.7%) of them experienced homelessness for four to eight weeks, 25.6% for less than one month, 17.1% for eight to twelve weeks, and 9.6% even longer than 12 weeks. Literature spanning the past decade does not clearly report an exact percentage of Veteran homelessness; however, ranges are estimated to be between 40,000 and 200,000 Veterans experiencing homelessness on any given night (National Coalition for Homeless Veterans). Findings on homelessness in this data set are considerably larger than what the National Council on Homeless Veterans (NCHV) reported in 2020, which is 11% of homeless people in the U.S. are Veterans, suggesting that a considerable number of Veterans are at risk for homelessness. Researchers suspect several reasons for a larger proportion of Veterans in this sample reporting homelessness. For example, the NCHV report that 50% of homeless Veterans are between the ages of 18-50, which represents the post 9/11 cohort. Similarly, as our sample focuses on the post 9/11 cohort, 80% of our sample are also between the ages of 18-50, which could partially account for the higher percentages of Veterans who experienced homelessness in this study. Further, findings in this current study could also be correlated with the number of women participants in this study and that women Veterans are three to four times more likely than nonveteran women to face homelessness (Washington et al., 2010). For example, 42.8% of participants in this study were female, even though females only account for 17% of current Service Members and 9.4% of Veterans in the U.S. Moreover, according to Absher (2018), in 2017 the number of female Veterans increased by 7% compared with the 1% for their male counterparts. Another reason that homelessness among this sample could be higher than the national level, is that the researchers did not use the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) definition of homelessness. Some Veterans consider themselves homeless if they do not have a permanent place of residency and are temporarily staying at their family or friends’ homes. According to the HUD definition of homeless, a person in this situation would not be defined as homeless.
Experience and Homelessness.

Veterans holding a combat-specific MOS (47.4%) reported homelessness at a higher rate than Veterans of a non-combat MOS (25.8%) and of those who hold both a combat and non-combat MOS (25.2%). In addition, data revealed that the number of deployments increases the risk of homelessness. While 21.1% of Veterans without a deployment reported homelessness in the past year, more than twice the number of Veterans with four deployments reported homelessness. Homelessness is also associated with age as younger Veterans are more likely to experience homelessness.
RESULTS

Public Assistance

Many Veterans rely on public assistance. A little less than half (43.7%) of the sample reported they receive at least one form of government-funded assistance. This finding suggests that Veterans have difficulty in self-sustaining in many dimensions of their civilian lives. About one in four Veterans surveyed rely on Food Stamps (24.4%), while 18.6% have Medicaid, 12.2% live in Public Housing, 8.0% use TANF cash assistance, and 5.0% use WIC benefits for infants and their mothers. Considering that about 34% of Veterans reported homelessness but only 12.2% rely on public housing assistance or Section 8 vouchers, a considerable number of Veterans are in need of subsidized or otherwise affordable housing.

This section explored various factors influencing Veterans civilian employment experiences. Data revealed that the number of children at home is associated with pay type, as the more children Veteran participants had at home, they more likely they were to earn an hourly wage as opposed to salary. Disability was also an influential factor, with about half of the sample reporting a service-connected disability, most of which were psychological in nature. Most Veterans who reported a disability also reported a belief that their disability is a barrier preventing them from finding and securing civilian employment. A surprising number of Veterans in this sample reported experiencing homeless in the past year, which could have been influenced by a multiple of factors, two of which are PTSD and deployment experience. Finally, a little less than half of this sample reported some reliance on public assistance, suggesting Veterans may struggle with self-sufficiency in their civilian lives. The follow discussion section explores meaning and implications behind the data revealed to this point, before concluding with key recommendations.
Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the employment experiences of a post 9/11 military-connected cohort. Statistical and qualitative data analysis revealed insight into Veterans’ civilian work experiences, including their employment status, job-seeking activities, and overall job satisfaction. Rich qualitative data about Veteran career fairs provided opportunity to learn how to improve an already successful tool for Veterans on the job hunt. Finally, factors influencing Veterans’ employment experiences vary from military rank to how many children are at home, type of service-connected disability, homeless experiences, and reliance on public assistance. The following sections discuss the meaning and implications of findings and conclude by providing lists of key recommendations for: 1) organizations and policymakers, 2) hosting Veteran job fairs, and 3) Veterans.

A SNAPSHOT OF VETERANS’ CIVILIAN WORK EXPERIENCES

Data from this study paints a comprehensive picture of Veterans in the U.S. labor market. Despite the majority of Veterans reporting being currently employed at the time of taking the survey, over half of those sampled were currently looking for another job. This may indicate that, many Veterans are seeking better employment opportunities. To find those opportunities, Veterans use many different resources, with programs connected to the Veterans Health Administration being the top resource they rely on. Veterans may feel most comfortable with this resource as it is most familiar and nationally known for being the organization that takes care of Veterans. Following the VA, Veterans also look to USA Jobs and non-for-profit Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) to seek employment. USA Jobs allows for “Veterans preference” status in applications and VSOs specifically tailor to the unique needs of Veterans, which account for why Veterans are likely to rely on these resources for their job seeking.

In terms of industry, the construction industry comprises the largest shares of Veterans in the labor market, followed by the finance and insurance sector, educational services, and lastly, information technology or media. By occupations or job title, Veterans largely work in average to high paying occupations that tend to require college degrees. One in five Veterans in our sample hold a management title and an additional 16.5% hold titles related to business, finance, computers, or mathematics. However, despite Veterans reporting holding these job titles, the majority of our sample (70%) was paid hourly instead of salary. Annual salary is often for jobs that require higher education and long-term commitment while hourly wage is more frequent in jobs that are part-time with unpredictable work shifts. Despite Veterans being more likely to hold job titles that require more education and are higher-paying, most Veterans in our sample did not earn salaries. Additional research may be necessary to further understand this finding, as a number of these industry occupations make use of independent contractors as opposed to employing salary workers.
In general, Veterans are satisfied with their employment. On a 1 (lowest) to 7 (highest) scale, 64% of respondents reported their job satisfaction to be higher than the mid-point of 4. Despite this high satisfaction, 55% of participants are currently looking for another job. This indicates that whereas Veterans are generally satisfied with their current employment, many are seeking new positions, perhaps driven to advance in their careers. Of the 55% of Veterans who reported currently looking for another job, many provided additional insight as to why they feel they have not yet found the job they seek. The top four reasons listed are not necessarily unique to Veterans; these include 1) insufficient pay/compensation, 2) location, 3) a competitive job market, and 4) scheduling problems. The next highest four reasons selected are specific to Veterans, however. These include 1) employers being concerned by past military experiences, 2) competing with candidates who have been in the job market longer, 3) trouble translating military skills to civilian jobs, and 4) employers being concerned with future military obligations. Veterans who reported they cannot secure the job they seek because of employers being concerned with past military experiences illuminates the impact of negative media portrayals of Veteran identity and military service. Competing with candidates who have spent more time in the labor market reflects struggles that Veterans face in translating their military skills to the civilian labor market. Service members are gainfully employed during their time in service but knowing how to translate skills acquired in the military institution to the civilian labor market is a barrier many Veterans experience when they transition out of military service and enter the job market. Finally, employers being concerned with future military obligations also reflects discriminatory perceptions of Veterans.

**VETERAN CAREER FAIRS ARE GENERALLY EFFECTIVE**

As Veterans generally tend to struggle with finding meaningful employment after military service, many organizations, universities, and corporations host Veteran-specific career or hiring fairs. Given that much time and resources are allocated for Veteran hiring events and scant research exists examining the impact and effectiveness of this employment tool, a special component of this study was to examine the effectiveness of Veteran career fairs. Participants evaluated the effectiveness of Veteran career fairs in many dimensions. About 62% of Veteran respondents attended a Veteran job fair in the past year, and a vast majority (73.2%) of them attended one to three Veteran job fairs total. Those who attended job fairs reported overall satisfaction with Veteran-specific fairs (75%), with a relatively high satisfaction level (51.1% reported that they were extremely satisfied). Finally, about 67% of Veterans secured a job through Veteran job fairs. This data suggests Veteran-specific hiring events are generally effective and that most Veterans are satisfied with this tool for job searching.

Qualitative data was analyzed to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of Veterans at career fairs. Of the percentage of Veterans who reported dissatisfaction with Veteran Career Fairs, many provided additional insight into why. Though all the reasons reported are not specific to Veterans, such as logistics and lack of earning a job as a result of the fair, overwhelmingly the responses given illuminate struggles that are specific to Veterans. Following dissatisfaction with operational logistics of career fairs, the second largest theme in this qualitative data set was the misalignment of military skills, career goals, and civilian job offerings. Several Veterans described feeling a mismatch between their military experience and skills and what employers were looking for in candidates. Some Veterans reported discrimination and lack of cultural sensitivity to
Veteran identity at career fairs, which highlights the repercussions of negative media portrayals of Veteran identity. Further, questioning the intentions of companies present at career fairs emerged as another theme in this qualitative data set; a few participants reported feeling as though some companies in attendance were motivated for marketing purposes. Finally, some participants reported being dissatisfied with Veteran career fairs because of the emphasis on low-wage and entry-level positions at these events. Veterans often bring an abundance of work experience and a diverse skill set with them after military service and want their military employment to be applicable when considering their overall experience in the work force. Though findings indicate Veteran-specific hiring and career fairs are generally effective, qualitative data provided further insight into how these fairs can be improved. A list of Key Recommendations for hosting Veteran Career Fairs is included in the Conclusion.

**SEVERAL FACTORS CREATE CHALLENGES FOR VETERAN EMPLOYMENT**

This data set revealed many factors influencing Veterans’ civilian work experiences, including childcare responsibilities, disabilities, homelessness, military deployment experiences, and reliance on public assistance. Like for non-Veterans, childcare responsibility hinders full-time employment. A statistically significant finding in this dataset is that the more children a Veteran has at home, the more likely he/she is to be paid by hourly wage rather than salary. Almost half (46.9%) of Veteran participants reported a service-connected disability. Most (78.2%) Veterans with a disability believe their service-related disability is a barrier to finding employment. Of Veterans who reported a disability, more reported a psychological disability than a physical disability. This lends to the need for further research and programs tailored to accommodating Veterans with psychological injuries in the labor market. Many Veterans in this sample reported experiencing homelessness in the past year. Combat exposure, PTSD, and homelessness all inter-connecitively create barriers to Veterans’ successful transition to the civilian labor market. 15.4% of our sample report PTSD and Veterans holding a combat MOS only as well as those holding both a combat and non-combat MOS experience PTSD at higher rates than Veterans with a non-combat MOS only. The similar pattern is found for homelessness by MOS. Veterans with only a combat MOS report higher rates of homelessness than Veterans with a non-combat MOS and those with both. The finding that homelessness experience increases with the number of deployments also suggests that combat exposure increases the risk of PTSD, which results in higher homelessness susceptibility. Finally, 43.7% of the sample reported that they rely on any sort of public assistance. These findings indicate that many Veterans have difficulty in self-sustainment, which ultimately impacts their experiences in the civilian labor market.

Military rank emerged as an influential factor on Veteran employment. Overall, our data shows that junior enlisted and warrant officers struggle more with civilian employment than NCOs and commissioned officers. A statistically significant finding in this study reveals that junior enlistees and warrant officers are more likely to receive an hourly wage while NCOs and officers are more likely to earn an annual salary. Further, junior enlistees and warrant officers appear to struggle more with finding employment than NCOs and commissioned officers do. More than half of junior enlistees (51.1%) and warrant officers (53.6%) reported they were currently looking for a job compared to only 37.5% of NCOs and 36.9% of commissioned officers. These findings indicate that junior enlistees and warrant officers are less likely than NCOs and commissioned
officers to find a job that fits their skills sets and career aspirations. Additional responses in the qualitative data illuminate these findings with comments such as, “I think there’s discrimination in the hiring process. Veteran commission officers are prioritized [more] than the enlisted Veterans,” and “I do not believe that employers think that a Veteran can be educated.”

In the military, NCOs and commissioned officers receive more leadership training and experience and thus develop a valuable skill that translates well into the civilian labor market. Commissioned Officers in the U.S. Military are required to possess a minimum of a bachelor’s degree and whereas NCO’s are not required to hold a college degree, they still gain more direct experience serving in leadership roles than do Junior Enlisted and Warrant Officers, given the rank structure. The differences between NCOs and Officers with Junior Enlisted and Warrant Officers may be further explained by differences in educational attainment. As discussed in the Background, Veterans’ educational attainment impacts both unemployment and earnings premiums (Kleykamp, 2013). Given these differences, Junior Enlisted and Warrant Officers may benefit most from job tools that assist with and facilitate the translation of military-specific skills for the civilian labor market. For this reason, employment policies which attempt to match military skills with civilian occupations are vitally important. An example of this practice is RAND’s development of “crosswalks” between the Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) code and civilian occupations to improve Veterans’ understanding of skill sets employers demand as well as inform employers of the skills possessed by Veterans (Wenger et al., 2017). These efforts are of particular importance given the perception of many employers that Veterans “tend not to tailor their resume to individual jobs, do not always translate skills well, and either overvalue or undervalue themselves” (Schaefer et al., 2016, 14). In the final section, we provide key recommendations for Veterans on the job hunt, organizations looking to hire Veterans, and hosting a Veteran career fair.
Conclusion

Data from this study revealed several key areas that warrant recommendation for action. First, when it comes to Veterans’ civilian work experiences, most are satisfied, about half are looking for another job, most rely on Veteran-focused search platforms when looking for work, many consider a technology that helps them to translate their military experiences into civilian job skills to be very important, and generally, Veterans are satisfied with their jobs. One concerning finding from this section was that Veterans are more likely to be paid hourly wage rather than salary, despite being more likely to hold a job title typically requiring educational attainment. Next, this study revealed that Veteran job fairs are generally effective, and Veterans are satisfied with and earn jobs as a result of them. However, deeper exploration into qualitative revealed many areas for improvement for institutions and organizations hosting Veteran job fairs.

Finally, data from this study illuminated several factors influencing Veteran’s experiences in the civilian labor market, including childcare, disability, homelessness, deployment experience, and reliance on public assistance. A critical finding in this data highlights the impact military rank has on civilian employment factors like income type and job satisfaction. Junior enlisted and warrant officers may benefit from more systemic support while transitioning to the civilian labor market. In order to translate our data into solutions, the following section contains key recommendations for organizations looking to recruit and retain Veterans in their workforce, for organizations and institutions hosting Veteran job fairs, and for Veterans looking to improve their readiness in the civilian job market.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

For Employers Seeking to Hire Veterans

7. Employers should provide incentive for current employees, specifically those who work in recruitment and human resources, to educate themselves on Military/Veteran cultural competency to combat some of the pervasive stereotypes that influence Veteran discrimination in the job market.

8. Employers with Veteran employment initiatives should focus on disseminating information to Veterans on Veteran-specific job searching websites, as these are the most common resources Veterans turn to in searching for employment.

9. Employers should focus more attention on both resources for Veterans with disabilities, as well as for junior enlisted and NCOs.

For Policymakers

1. The DoD and Veteran-serving state and local public agencies should widely publicize developed military-to-civilian job crosswalks for matching military aptitudes to civilian job skills.

2. As homelessness, unemployment, and behavioral health issues often go hand in hand, state and local officials can advocate for comprehensive services Veterans may need when looking for employment.
For example, they can implement a temporary housing subsidy while Veterans are looking for employment and during their first year of employment to reduce the number of Veterans that are homeless and to help motivate Veterans to look for and secure employment.

3. An expansive “Know Your Employee Rights” course offered to Veterans as they transition out of service may be a complementary component to the current DoD Transition Assistance Program (TAP). Such programming would expand upon TAP’s USERRA education to include protecting oneself against wage theft, employee misclassification and other types of employment discrimination.

For Hosting Job Fairs

1. Collect information beforehand about Veteran prospective attendees. Have Veterans register for the event beforehand and in doing so, collect information about their level of education, work experience, and career goals. Use this information both select and share with employers attending the event.

2. Strategically invite employers from sectors that align with what registered Veterans report as of interest for their career goals. This will help create more synergy at the event between what Veterans are looking for and what employers are hiring for.

3. Collect information beforehand about employers. Survey companies registered for event to determine how many available positions they have to fill, including sector and position type, pay range, and requirements for each position. Relay this information to registered Veteran attendees to help them best prepare for the fair.

4. Focus on educating employer and Veteran participants. For example, request for all employer representatives who attend to complete the (free) “Veteran 101: Military Culture” course with PsychArmor Institute (or an equivalent) in order to reduce discriminatory or culturally insensitive behavior towards Veteran attendees.

5. Communicate relevant information about the job fair with registered Veteran attendants in advance to help them best prepare for the fair. Information should include what employers are registered to attend and positions available including type, pay range, and requirements for each position as well as information about technology platforms, such as Jobpath, that help them translate their military skills into a civilian resume before the event.

For Veterans

1. Veterans should consider taking the Virtual Tap Program for a refresher course on the key curriculum covered before separating from the military. This new and innovative online approach is available to Veterans and spouses of service members: https://webdm.dmdd.osd.mil/dodtap/virtual_curriculum.html

2. Veterans should know their benefits and decide what resources would benefit them the most with securing a job, such as taking advantage of the VA’s GI Bill or apprenticeship programs. If a Veteran needs help with this, they should reach out to a local Veteran Service Officer or contact the VA directly.

3. Veterans should get assistance and ask for help with developing their resume(s) and with translating military experiences into common verbiage recruiters can relate to. If interested in finding a civilian job that relates to the Veterans military occupation, they should take advantage of the resources available...
that can assist them with finding similar occupations in the civilian realm. For example, the Department of Labor has an online tool called Military Occupational Code Crosswalk that can do just this.

4. Network, network, network! Statistics show that the technique most successful for helping people in attaining a job is through networking. The numbers vary, but between 70-85% of people find and secure jobs through networking. Veterans should take advantage of online networking sites like LinkedIn and professional mentoring programs like American Corporate Partners’ one on one mentoring program for Veterans.

5. Veterans should create an elevator pitch and know how to tell their unique story by using the Situation, Task, Action, Result (STAR) technique for answering behavioral interview questions. Once a Veteran feels comfortable with answering interview questions with this technique, they should practice through participating in mock interviews.
Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Despite the meaningful findings on the factors that influence Veterans in their transition to the civilian labor market, this study also has limitations. Our sample is from the Veteran panels recruited by Qualtrics rather than randomly sampled among post-9/11 Veterans not already captured through Qualtrics panels. Although our sample resembles the national level post-9/11 Veteran population in terms of age, place of residence, and many military backgrounds, our findings may not be generalizable to all Veterans in the U.S. For example, researchers asked Qualtrics to oversample women Veterans in order to examine gender differences in many dimensions. Such an oversampling of women, in combination with how homelessness was investigated in this study in addition to monetary compensation that might have drawn Veterans in need, may result in a higher proportion of Veterans reporting homelessness than expected. Thus, future research analyzing data from more nationally or locally representative samples will help researchers better understand Veterans’ general situations. Second, the research design is cross-sectional, although this survey includes a few historical questions such as years since separation. This cross-section of data did not allow researchers to examine the situations Veterans face at each stage of military-to-civilian employment transitions. A panel study that traces a cohort of Veterans regularly will help us to examine the dynamics of Veterans’ transitions more clearly. Third, this study did not include employer perspectives. Veterans’ successful civilian employment can be possible only when both employers and career seeking Veterans understand each other’s expectations, Veterans’ skills and their transferability to civilian jobs. Thus, future studies would provide more insight through focusing on employers’ perceptions of Veterans, and their challenges in hiring Veterans. Overall, future research that examines communication and transparency between both employers looking to hire Veterans and Veterans searching for jobs could yield fruitful insight into successful transitions from military service into the civilian labor market. Finally, future analyses would provide more nuanced information into specific groups of Veterans by examining factors such as race, military branches, and regions.
References


REFERENCES


