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Factors Associated with Successful Military-to-Civilian Transition Among Special Forces Veterans

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FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SUCCESSFUL MILITARY-TO-CIVILIAN TRANSITION AMONG
SPECIAL FORCES VETERANS

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DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Social Work at the University of Kentucky

By
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2023

Abstract

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SUCCESSFUL MILITARY-TO-CIVILIAN TRANSITION AMONG

SPECIAL FORCES VETERANS

The purpose of this study was to explore the military-to-civilian transitional experience in a sample of Special Forces veterans. Acknowledging challenges in accessing the veteran population, most existing research on the military-to-civilian transition consolidates military occupations into a single sample. This method fails to address the intricacies that may exist within individual military occupations, especially that of U.S. Army Special Forces soldiers. Special Forces qualified soldiers represent the largest portion of all U.S. Military Special Operations Forces and are responsible for the majority of all Special Operations activities, yet their experience in transitioning out of the Army is largely unknown. This study was guided by two research questions. The first was to determine the contribution of life experiences and demographic characteristics, such as levels of civilian education, civilian employment, relationships and social support, deployment histories, and transitional preparedness, in predicting reported ease of readjustment to civilian life. The second was to determine if these experiences and demographic characteristics predicted reported satisfaction with life. Using multiple regression modeling, this study determined that time spent actively preparing for transition and level of civilian education at discharge were associated with better-reported ease of transition, and ease of transition, current employment satisfaction, and marital status were associated with reported greater satisfaction with life.

Keywords: Satisfaction with life, military transition, Army, Special Forces (Green Berets), veteran

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Chapter One- Introduction

Over three million service members have served in the U.S. military between September 11, 2001, and 2018 (Holder, 2018). Although some research has been conducted on the experiences of those who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, the experience of service members transitioning out of the military remains an understudied area, with a limited body of extant empirical findings (Black & Papile, 2010; Park et al., 2021; Sokol et al., 2021). While most veterans transition out of the military with little trouble (Coll & Weiss, 2013; Cooper et al., 2018; Vogt, 2017), researchers have reported that some cite difficulty in managing the process (Park et al., 2021; Vogt, 2018, & Whitworth et al., 2020). Parker and colleagues found that 21% of pre-9/11 and 47% of post-9/11 veterans were likely to describe the process as difficult (Parker et al., 2019). The transition can be extremely impactful and can cause difficulties for the individual and their family in a myriad of ways (Black & Papile, 2010). Variables related to education (Morin, 2011), employment, and social support (Ahern et al., 2015; Black & Papile, 2010), have been identified as having an impact on the process. It is estimated that less than 5% of enlisted service members will become eligible for the traditional 20-year retirement/pension (Coll & Weiss, 2013; Parker et al., 2019). As a result, it is assumed that a majority of veterans will either first pursue further civilian education or immediately return to the civilian workforce.

Previous research on the military-to-civilian transitional experience has focused on health-related outcomes (Vogt, 2018). This commonly includes exploring differences by gender, those with or without a diagnosis of PTSD or traumatic brain injury, those

1

who have or have not deployed, and those at risk of suicide (Morin, 2011; Parker et al., 2019; Sokel et al., 2021). A small number of variables have been used and little is known about veteran employment, social relationships, and financial well-being (Vogt, 2018). Accessing the veteran population to study can be challenging (Bascetta, 2002). As a result, a majority of studies are limited to cross-sectional and convenience sampling. These studies obscure differences within the veteran population (Kleykamp, 2013) and rarely provide enough analytic strength to focus on differences between military branches or occupations (Park et al., 2021). This is unfortunate, as researchers have also found that differences among military occupations are associated with exposure to combat, mental health diagnosis, and issues related to social support (Gubata et al., 2013; Pitts et al., 2013; Pitts et al., 2014). This has led some researchers to speculate that needs at and after discharge may be different as well (Frueh et al., 2020; Gubata, et al., 2013; Pitts et al., 2013; Pitts et al., 2014; Ursano et al., 2017) and highlight the need for additional research in this area (Vogt, 2018).

This may be important when considering the needs of a highly unique population within the Army. Frequently referred to as "Green Berets,"

Special Forces soldiers are thoroughly screened and selected for a specific set of physical and psychological attributes (Picano et al., 2012). These soldiers train and are counted on to perform in non-routine, hazardous, and high-demand environments (Picano et al., 2012). Although Special Forces soldiers represent over 50% of all Special Operations Forces (SOF) personnel (Feickert, 2021; USSOCOM, 2021), they represent only a small fraction of U.S. Army soldiers discharged annually. Special Forces are

commonly the first service members deployed to high-risk environments and are

exposed to intense combat more than their conventional military counterparts (Cooper

et al., 2019). As a result, Special Forces soldiers, account for 60% of all SOF casualties

(Kessler et al., 2021). According to a former commander of U.S. Special Operations

Command, General Raymond Thomas (as cited by Cahn, 2017), "special operations

forces are deploying at a rate that is unsustainable." This has led to many Green Berets

now facing medical, emotional, and social problems as they transition into civilian life

(Frueh et al., 2020).

Accordingly, this study will provide a brief historical background of U.S. Army

Special Forces and summarize findings from a systematic review of literature focusing

on Special Forces veterans and their military-to-civilian transitional experience. This

study seeks to address gaps within the literature and discusses its findings relative to

future research and policy development in the social sciences and veteran support

services.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this quantitative study was twofold. The first was to determine

the contribution of life experiences and demographic characteristics, such as levels of

civilian education, employment, relationships and social support (marital or parental

status), deployment histories, and transitional preparedness, had in predicting reported

ease of readjustment to civilian life. The second was to explore differences in participant

satisfaction with life, related to their reported ease of transition, life experiences, and

relevant demographic characteristics. These include the participants' reported ease of

readjustment, levels of civilian education, employment, relationships and social support (marital or parental status), deployment histories, and transitional preparedness. This study examined the following research questions.

Research Questions

1. Are Special Forces veterans more likely to report an easier readjustment to civilian life based on life experiences and relevant demographic characteristics such as levels of civilian education, employment, relationships and social support (marital status, parental status), deployment histories (number of deployments, type, combat trauma, etc.) and transitional preparedness? This question translates into the following null hypothesis.

   o H_o: Reported ease of readjustment to civilian life does not differ based on experiences and demographic variables such as levels of civilian education and employment, relationships and social support (marital or parental status), deployment histories (number of deployments, type, combat trauma, etc.), and transitional preparedness.

2. Are Special Forces veterans more likely to report differences in satisfaction with life, based on experiences and relevant demographic characteristics such as their reported ease of readjustment to civilian life, levels of civilian education, employment, relationships and social support (marital or parental status), deployment histories (number of deployments, type, combat trauma, etc.), and transitional preparedness? This question translates into the following null hypothesis.

- H_o: Reported satisfaction with life does not differ based on experiences and demographic variables such as their report an easier readjustment to civilian life levels of civilian education and employment, relationships and social support (marital or parental status), deployment histories (number of deployments, type, combat trauma, etc.), and transitional preparedness.

Overview of Dissertation

This dissertation will first present an introduction to the Special Forces population, providing orientation and context to this unique population. Next, a thorough literature review of Special Forces veterans and their experience in transitioning out of the Army is given. The following section provides a conceptual framework selected to not only clarify the transitional experience but acknowledge limitations to human decision-making behaviors. Chapter three clearly explains the methodological process, including a description of participants, instruments, and analytic procedures used for this study. The results of this study are reported in great detail in Chapter four, followed by a discussion of their implications, limitation, and suggestions for future research in the final chapter, Chapter five.

Chapter Two- Review of Literature

Chapter two synthesizes important literature regarding the experience of

veterans who served in the U.S. Army as Special Forces soldiers transitioning into civilian

life. This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section offers a brief history of

Special Operations Forces, specifically, Special Forces qualified soldiers, to help clarify

their demographic background and characteristics. The second section provides a

background for the study based on themes found in the existing military-to-civilian

transition literature. These included demographic characteristics such as level of civilian

education and civilian employment, areas of social and relational support, and how

having a deployment history or having been exposed to combat can impact the

transitional experience. It also focuses on the veteran's level of preparedness and time

spent actively preparing for the military-to-civilian transitional process. The third section

of this chapter includes a discussion of the limitations and potential bias within existing

research. The fourth and final section provides an integrative theoretical and conceptual

framework that will help structure understanding of the military-to-civilian transitional

experience. This section will elaborate on the reintegration process that veterans face as

they transition out of the military. This framework will also help in clarifying the role

psychological variables play in the decision and experience of transitioning out of the

military-related to the variables discussed in the previous section.

An Introduction to Special Operations

Special Operations Forces (SOF) have become the go-to option for managing

today's complex battlefield (Hennigan, 2017). The term "SOF" is a commonly used

umbrella term to describe special operation units from all military branches (Bucci, 2015; Feickert, 2021; USSOCOM, 2021). Designed as a supplement to conventional force missions, individual military branches identified the benefit of these smaller non-traditional units in addressing high-risk, nonroutine, or unconventional mission requirements (Atlamazoglou, 2019). As a result of their utility and reliability throughout the Global War on Terror, the use of SOF has shifted to where conventional forces are now requested to support SOF-specific missions (Atlamazoglou, 2019).

While SOF units vary in size, specialties, and capabilities, they share many common capabilities, core principles, and priorities and are present in almost all branches of the military (USSOCOM Office of Communication, 2021). These include units such as the U.S. Navy's Navy SEALS and Special Warfare Combatant-craft Crewman or SWCC, the U.S. Air Force's Pararescue and Combat Controllers, and the U.S. Marine's Raiders (Feickert, 2021). Though SOF units may appear to have many similar characteristics, missions and branch-specific requirements highlight the need for different units, members, and equipment. For example, the Navy's maritime focus versus the Air Force, which focuses on aviation needs.

The U.S. Army, including Reserves and National Guard units, is the largest branch of the military with almost 1.2 million service members (Total Force Manpower & Resources Directorate, 2019) it also hosts the largest SOF representation (USSOCOM Office of Communication, 2021). United States Army Special Operations Command or USASOC, commands Army SOF units including the 75th Ranger Regiment, Civil Affairs, Psychological Operations, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, and Special

Forces (USSOCOM Office of Communication, 2021). Though USASOC represents

approximately 3% of the total Army, including Reserve and National Guard forces (DOD,

2018), it's approximately 35,000 members account for over 50% of all SOF forces

(Fickert, 2021; USSOCOM Office of Communication, 2021).

SOF soldiers represent the pinnacle of elite warriors, having been screened for

their intelligence, resiliency, and fitness, which is then further honed through continued

challenging and realistic training (Skipper et al., 2014). To be clear, not all members of

SOF units are operational or qualified personnel or "operators" (Torreon & Feichert,

2020). Most SOF units have a considerable amount of support service members or

"enablers" to help fulfill and accomplish the mission. For example, Naval Special

Warfare (NSW) comprises approximately 10,000 active-duty and Reserve members

(Feichert, 2021; USSOCOM Office of Communication, 2021). Within NSW, less than

3,000 (active-duty and Reserve) of its members are qualified SEALS and approximately

700 are qualified Special Warfare Combatant Crewman (SWCC) while the remaining

members fill valuable medical, support, and sustainment roles ("Number of SWCC

Forces," n.d.). Special Forces units consist of two National Guard and five active-duty

groups of about 1400 service members each (Feichert, 2021). Of the approximately

6,700 qualified Green Berets in the Army, approximately 900 are assigned to each

group, while the remaining 500 personnel per group fill important non-operational

support roles (Baldor, 2019; Yancy-Bragg, 2020). These examples reveal the percentage

of qualified Navy SEALS and Green Berets are well below 1% of their affiliated military

branches. Though few, Special Forces soldiers make up the largest portion of SOF

operational personnel (Feickert, 2021; USSOCOM Office of Communication, 2021).

Special Forces

Special Forces (SF) commonly referred to as "Green Berets" are commonly the

first service members deployed to high-risk environments and are exposed to intense

combat more than their conventional military counterparts (Cooper et al., 2019) making

them an extraordinarily unique population (Kessler et al., 2021).

With roots developed in the Office of Strategic Services or OSS units of WWII, the

U.S. Army wanted a unit that could perform discretely behind enemy lines, and in 1952,

as the U.S. entered the Cold War, the first Special Forces unit was created (Green

Berets, 2016). The first Green Beret appeared in 1954, though was not officially

authorized until October 1961 (Davis & Hamilton, 2016; Kelly, 1973). President Kennedy,

seeing the value of the guerrilla-style unit, authorized the Green Beret as their official

headgear citing it as a "symbol of excellence, a badge of courage, a mark of distinction in

the fight for freedom" (Green Berets, 2016). Traditionally assigned to a 12-man

operational detachment, Green Berets are expected to work as teachers and diplomats

in addition to their Special Forces military occupation specialty (MOS) (Diana et al.,

1997). Often operating in remote areas with foreign militaries and resistance groups,

Green Berets train for both direct and indirect operations (Bucci, 2015). More

commonly, Green Berets focus on indirect missions, including unconventional warfare,

where they work as force multipliers in enabling and empowering indigenous resistance

groups to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government of sitting political power (Bucci,

2015). Additional indirect missions include counterinsurgency and foreign internal

defense where SF detachments support, teach, and train a country's internal defense

forces against terrorism, insurgency, and other threats to the country's stability (Bucci,

2015).

Creating a fully operational Green Beret is one of the longest individual trainings

in the Army at approximately 18 months (www.goarmy.com., n.d.-a.). Those interested

in earning their Green Beret must not only meet physical requirements, but

psychological requirements as well. Acknowledging the scarcity of literature on the

psychological assessment and selection of special operations personnel, Picano and

colleagues (2012) wrote in their chapter on the assessment and selection of high-risk

operational personnel in military psychology:

> High-risk military personnel typically engage in critical and sensitive national
>
> security missions; employ nonroutine, nonstandard, or unconventional military
>
> tactics; deploy frequently and often for prolonged durations to denied or hostile
>
> environments in various cultural settings; operate fairly independently without
>
> much logistical or tactical support; and often encounter unknown and
>
> uncontrollable situational factors demanding ingenuity, expertise, initiative, and
>
> a high degree of common sense to avoid mission failure (Picano, et al., 2012,
>
> p.50).

The authors cite these high-risk operational military personnel as performing

hazardous, high-risk, high-demand non-routine military duties, and that applicants

should "possess an identifiable set of core psychological attributes regardless of the

specific mission or job they perform" (Picano, et al., 2012, p.51). Picano and his colleagues found that in addition to physical fitness and intrinsic motivation, applicants also needed an incredible tolerance of stress and the ability to provide sound judgment while under stress, emotional stability, initiative, reliability and integrity, and competitiveness (Picano, et al., 2012).

The path to earning their Green Beret can be arduous. In the recent past, it has cost the lives of at least two Special Forces candidates. One, in 2002, was misidentified and shot by police (Deputy kills soldier during Green Beret exercise, 2002) and another in 2017 was killed by explosives in a demolitions training accident (Tan, 2017). The process of assessing and training new Special Forces soldiers has evolved over decades of refining to identify and train the best candidates. Depending on the year, less than 300 to almost 800 new Green Berets (Pavelko, 2017), will graduate (Baldor, 2019) though this is only a fraction of those who attempt.

Interested candidates start by completing the grueling 3-week Special Forces Assessment and Selection (SFAS). Established in the late 1980s, SFAS was designed to assess a candidate's suitability for Special Forces training (Zazanis, 1997). SFAS includes intelligence, language, and cognitive problem-solving tests that are often interwoven between and into physical events such as land navigation, timed runs, weighted marches, an obstacle course, and other physical training and assessments to provide a multi-stressor environment to assess the interested candidates (Farina et al., 2019). Research conducted by Farina and colleagues (2019) on 12 SFAS classes between May 2015 and March 2017 found a total SFAS selection rate of 31% (247 of 800). The authors

noted that most candidates failed to complete the course citing reasons including

voluntarily withdrawing, failing the fitness test, medical conditions or injuries, integrity

and safety violations, and generally not meeting SFAS standards (2019). Research

conducted by Beal (2010) of four SFAS classes between 2008 and 2009 (n=824) revealed

a selection rate of 46% citing that 40% of candidates voluntarily withdrew before the

course was finished. Data collected from 1992 to 1993 revealed similar results to Beal

(2010) which identified an SFAS selection rate of 46% (Brooks, 1997).

Although no statistical differences in selection rates based on age or community

of origin have been reported (Farina et al., 2019), researchers have found that soldiers

who held a combat MOS before attending SFAS, had a slightly higher rate of selection

over candidates with a non-combat MOS (Beal, 2010, Farina et al., 2019). Farina and

colleagues found that predictors of selection included those with less than a year of

active duty and candidates who were not married or had any children (2019). They also

found that candidates who had graduated from Army Ranger school, candidates raised

in a mountain region, and candidates who had a bachelor's degree were more likely to

be selected (2019).

In 2018, only 8% of enlisted service members held a bachelor's degree or higher

(Department of Defense, 2018) while the percentage of enlisted SFAS candidates who

held a bachelor's degree was 14% and 35% for 18Xs (a soldier who enlists with a

contract for Special Forces) (Farina et al., 2019).

Becoming a Green Beret is voluntary and an invitation to attend the Special

Forces Qualification Course (SFQC) after SFAS, does not guarantee the applicant will

complete the course. 18Xs (soldiers who enlist with a contract for Special Forces) must

first complete basic training, the infantry MOS course (22 weeks), the basic Airborne

course (three weeks), and the Special Operations Preparatory Course (four weeks)

before they attend SFAS like all interested candidates (www.goarmy.com, n.d.-b.).

Selected candidates are then invited to attend the Special Forces Qualification Course

(SFQC). Of the 1228 selected soldiers in a 1992-1993 study, only 969 started the SFQC,

and 703 finished, or one in four (26%) of the original sample of 2673 SFAS candidates

(Brooks, 1997). Those who are unsuccessful at any point in the training will return to

their existing MOS or for 18Xs, are assigned to the infantry. Graduates of the SFQC are

assigned a new SF MOS and authorized to wear the Green Beret and Special Forces tab.

SFQC graduates are now fully qualified Special Forces Green Berets and are then

assigned to one of the five active duty groups or return to one of two National Guard

Special Forces groups.

Diversity in SOF

Leaders within SOF have worked to address limitations to diversity for years

(Baldor, 2021; Kirby et al, 2000). Although data on the diversity of Special Forces units

are limited, in 2021, 87% of Special Forces qualified officers and 84% of enlisted were

Caucasian, while 2% and 4% of them were African American (Baldor, 2021). This is only a

slight change from what was cited in 1997, in that Caucasians represent 86% of enlisted

Special Forces qualified soldiers (Kirby, Harrell, & Slone, 2000). This is a significant

difference when considering the entire Department of Defense, of which in 2018,

Caucasians were represented by 77% of officers and 67% of enlisted service members,

and African Americans percentage were 9% and 19% respectively (Department of Defense, 2018).

Brooks (1997) reported that when evaluating 2673 SFAS candidates from 1992 to 1993, general technical scores from the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery eliminated almost twice as many African American candidates and that African American candidates failed the swim test at a rate of six times that of their Caucasian peers. Kirby and colleagues (2000) also speculate that a lack of peers pursuing a SOF occupation and a lack of minority mentors already in Special Forces may be part of the issue and that this could also lead to a perception of racism within the organization.

Excluding enabler or support positions available to all service members, applying to SFAS was restricted to males until 2016. As this policy has recently changed (Murphy, 2016), only three women have thus far completed the SFQC, one in 1980 who was given an exception to attend the SFQC, and two, graduating in 2020, who remain on active duty (Black, 2021). While efforts have been made to diversify the organization, females and racial minorities remain underrepresented in the ranks of qualified Special Forces individuals.

Special Operations Forces are present in nearly every fight around the world (Cahn, 2017). Special Forces represent over 50% of all SOF (Feickert, 2021) and have been deployed to 135 of the 195 recognized countries in the last decade (Bymer et al., 2018). Because of their utility and reliability, SOF and SF units have enjoyed significant growth in status, prestige, and funding (Haynes, 2019). While these exclusive units may have benefited from these outcomes, they remain one of the most unique (Cronk, 2014)

and understudied military populations (Russel et al., 2016). Our understanding of their

members' transitional experience is virtually unknown (Coons, 2018; Garner, 2018).

Thematic Commonalities throughout Military Transition Literature

The following literature review discusses common constructs found in the

existing military-to-civilian transition literature. The scope of this review includes

disciplines of social work, sociology, psychology, and other behavioral sciences. This

literature review was guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews

and Meta-systematic Analysis (Prisma, 2021) and the guidelines as described in Boland

and colleagues' student manual (Boland et al., 2017). While the focus of this literature

review was on the military-to-civilian transition of Special Forces veterans, the lack of

existing research on this topic forced the search criteria to be expanded to include all

military veterans.

Five electronic bibliographic databases were ultimately selected as they provided

a thorough and wide range of behavioral and social science publications. The databases

include Academic Search Complete, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, APA

PsychInfo, Social Work Abstracts, and Sociological Collection. In addition, Google and

Google Scholar were also used to identify any further eligible studies or gray literature.

Common constructs include demographic characteristics such as level of civilian

education and civilian employment, areas of social and relational support, and how

having a deployment history or having been exposed to combat can impact the

transitional experience. The last variable of this section focuses on the veterans' level of

preparedness and time spent actively preparing for the military-to-civilian transitional

process.

Civilian Education

The path to civilian education varies, as some will move from high school directly

to college, while others postpone college for military service. Nevertheless, rates of

civilian education attainment between military veterans and their civilian counterparts

are relatively indifferent (Cate, 2014). The benefits of higher levels of civilian education

is well documented as college graduates are more likely to secure consistent

employment, have higher incomes, and lead to healthier lifestyles than those who are

not college graduates (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013). To discuss levels of civilian education

for the military veteran population, one must examine both those with college degrees

and those without.

Veterans with college degrees have been found to have an easier time

transitioning out of the military. Morin (2011) found in their study of 1853 veterans who

served in the first ten years following September 11, 2011, that their level of civilian

education was one of three statistically significant predictors of an easy transitional

experience and accounted for 5% of the reported ease of transition when using logistic

regression. This is consistent with other populations in transition, including professional

athletes transitioning out of their sport (Black & Papile, 2010; Park, Lavallee, & Tod,

2012) or those transitioning out of prison (Visher & Travis, 2003).

While transitioning out of the military may be easier for those with a college

degree, this ease is not found with the majority of veterans. The U.S. Army consists of

three groups of service members, commissioned officers, warrant officers, and enlisted soldiers. Enlisted soldiers account for 81% of the force, though only 8.7% report having a bachelor's degree or higher (Department of Defense, 2019). This is logical, as a high school diploma or equivalent is the minimum educational requirement for enlistment. Because of the higher percentage of enlisted soldiers in the Army, it can be assumed that most veterans will pursue additional education after discharge, before or during their return or entry into the civilian workforce (Zogas, 2017). While veterans with a high school education, or less, tend to earn more than their civilian peers, they are also more likely to be enrolled in college than their civilian peers (Guo, Pollak, & Bauman, 2016; Kleykamp, 2013). Approximately half of the Parker et al. sample (n=1087) reported enrolling in school after leaving the military (2019) and for Morreale (2012), a majority of their sample of 175 military veteran college students reported their intention to continue through and beyond their bachelor's program to pursue graduate degrees. Veterans also earn postsecondary degrees at a rate similar to non-veterans (Cate, 2014).

Military veterans as college students are generally older and often have many different life experiences than traditional college students, which may influence their ability to be successful (Williams, 2016). While these may be important variables to consider, Williams (2016) found that veteran students attending a community college, having a spouse, and/or dependent children, and being academically prepared accounted for 24% of the variance in cumulative GPA and accounted for 90% of the variance in predicting intent to return to school (Williams, 2016).

Combat exposure and unit of assignment also play a role in adjustment to civilian life and higher education. Veterans exposed to combat are more likely to experience increased challenges at work or school (Kukla, Rattray, & Salyers, 2015) while others reported that their units support during deployment, current social support, anxiety, and posttraumatic symptoms were significantly associated with later academic success (Campbell & Riggs, 2015).

What is not clear is the typical level of civilian education of the Special Forces veteran population. In a recent survey of 456 U.S. SOF soldiers, 52% with service in a U.S. Army SOF unit, reported a high level of civilian education as 24% reported having bachelor's degrees, and 51% with advanced degrees (Global SOF Foundation, 2021). These results must be interpreted carefully, as they do not fully explain differences between officers and enlisted participants, or those who served in SOF positions as qualified SOF operational personnel, or enabler support positions. Other research conducted by Farina and colleagues (2019) found that of 800 SFAS candidates (soldiers attending the Special Forces Assessment and Selection course), 31% reported having bachelor's degrees while 48% reported completing "some college." It should be noted that of the 800 participants, 8% (61 of 800) were officers while the remaining 92% (739 of 800) were enlisted soldiers (Farina et al., 2019). Unfortunately, candidates serving on active duty as opposed to the National Guard were not delineated. Second, levels of education were not broken down between enlisted and commissioned officers. Finally, this only accounts for Special Forces candidates, of which only one in four would be expected to complete the qualification course and become fully qualified (Farina et al.,

2019), nor does it account for education attained during their career after attending SFAS. Because of these limitations, this sample may not be fully representative of the level of civilian education of Special Forces soldiers at discharge or the Special Forces veteran population.

Employment

Acknowledging the value of existing historical qualitative data, there is an overall dearth of research addressing the veteran transition to the civilian workforce (Chopade & Gupta, 2020; Krigbaum et al., 2020). Regardless of this gap, it should come as little surprise that a successful transition out of the military can have a significant impact on a veteran's viability in job searches, and their overall potential for civilian employment (Minnis, 2017). Additionally, service members are returning to the civilian workforce in what McKay & McKay describe as the prime working years of their lives (McKay, B., & McKay, K., 2019) making employment a highly salient focus of the transitional experience. In fact, for those veterans with a deployment history, employment success is connected to how supportive the service members' unit was during their deployment (Campbell & Riggs, 2015). Campbell and Riggs (2015) stated that unit support, while deployed, in addition to current social supports, were significantly associated with occupational adjustment.

The Global SOF Foundation (2021) found in their 2020 survey of former Special Operations soldiers and officers, that finding a job was the single most important concern for their participants while in transition. Park et al. (2021) used repeated measures throughout a 12-month period and found that employment stressors

remained consistent through the duration of their longitudinal study of 402 veterans,

but that the difficulties of finding or maintaining employment declined over time. Two

other studies between 2014 and 2016 found that 65% to 80% of the veterans surveyed

(n=722 and n=1294) left the military without a job, expecting to find meaningful

employment quickly" (Castro, et al., 2017; Kintzle, et al., 2016). This trend is consistent

with the findings of Parker and colleagues (2019) who found that only 25% of veterans

left the military already having secured civilian employment while 48% reported

currently seeking or planning to look for employment right away. Interestingly, 46% of

that 48%, of those with a job lined up were commissioned officers, who only represent

17.2% of the military (Department of Defense, 2019). This may be due to the fact that a

bachelor's degree is required for commissioned officers compared to an enlisted service

member who only requires a high-school diploma or equivalent. Veterans who served as

commissioned officers are less likely to return to school and those returning to school

after their military service may focus on pursuing higher degrees or specialized training.

While the U.S. military is one of the most influential developers of talent in the

civilian workforce (Carpenter & Silberman, 2020), establishing oneself post-military

service can pose significant difficulties for the under-prepared or those struggling with

the transition (Global SOF Foundation, 2021). Though veterans are more likely to make

more than their demographically similar civilian peers (Guo, Pollak, & Bauman, 2016),

this does not mean the transition will be simple.

VetAdvisor and Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families

found that over 40% of veteran respondents left their first job after the military because

the job did not match the veteran's goals or occupational objectives (2014). This is

unfortunate, as veterans tend to make excellent employees (Guo, Pollak, & Bauman,

2016). The VetAdvisor and Syracuse University (2014) study also found other reasons for

leaving a job, including a lack of career development or advancement, the work was not

meaningful, or was unchallenging. It may have offered inadequate compensation or

professional development, and did not match their skills or education level. Finding

meaningful or challenging work may be essential to consider when discussing Special

Forces veterans. In their 2019 study of Special Forces candidates, Farina and colleagues

found that the number one variable that was correlated with being selected in SFAS was

physical fitness scores. This being said, when comparing Special Forces soldiers to

professional athletes, we can consider the transitional experience of athletes as they

leave their sport. Park, Lavallee, & Tod found that those athletes who felt they did not

achieve what they had intended while in their sport, took longer to transition into

another career where they were challenged and felt they had meaning (2013).

Relationships and Social Support

Relationships, including peers and mentors, family and marital, and other types

of social support, demonstrated different impacts on veterans through the transitional

process. Ahern and colleagues found in their qualitative study that the use of a support

system served as a helpful resource in improving the transition (2015). Military units

themselves and the support they provide to service members while deployed are

significantly associated with reducing anxiety and symptoms of post-traumatic stress

(Campbell & Riggs, 2015). Though important, it is also critical to acknowledge how the

military as a support system is no longer present after a service member is discharged (Basinger, Wehrman, Delaney, & McAninch, 2015).

Peers and Mentors. Multiple researchers have found that having a peer or mentor is a key resource in a successful military-to-civilian transition. Researchers Ahern and colleagues (2015) conducted semi-structured interviews with 24 Iraq and/or Afghanistan Veterans from all military branches (17 male, 7 female, ages 22 to 55) focusing on what was most helpful during the transition and what challenges made the experience more difficult. In addition to identifying themes like, "the military felt like a family," "searching for new normal," and "normal is alien," they also found that having a peer mentor served as a thread of connectedness to the military (Ahern et al., 2015). They stated that the peer mentor was a familial type of resource, someone relatable, who understood the feelings of disconnectedness, the lack of structure, and the lack of purpose (Ahern et al., 2015). The researchers also pointed out how peer mentors were the most common resource for a successful transition into the civilian world, providing practical advice and an important emotional resource throughout the process (2015).

Park, Lavallee, & Tod (2013) conducted a meta-analysis of professional athletes transitioning out of their sport and found similar results when considering family and other close relationships. They found that this closeness with others eased some difficulties during the experience. Black and Papile (2010) found in their online survey of 216 Canadian Forces veterans (93% male, 62% ages 40-60) that the most immediate difficulties following their discharge were related to friendships and family.

Coons (2018) found in their sample (n=595) that contact with other veterans was positively and significantly correlated with an easier adjustment to civilian life. Other researchers Park et al. (2021) found in their sample (n=402) that higher levels of social support were consistent with other research highlighting its association with increasing psychological resilience and an easier transition.

Familial and Marital Support. For veterans who are married, marital satisfaction can play multiple roles in supporting the transitioning veteran. Black and Papile (2010) found in their sample, of which 80% were married, that respondents' relationship with their spouses was a contributing variable in a successful transition. Conversely, research on U.S. veterans who served between September 11, 2001, and 2010 found that being married increased the difficulty in transitioning by almost 15 score points (Morin, 2011). These researchers found that 61% reported being married while deployed, and no matter how they described the impact of their deployment on their relationship, positive or negative, those married participants were more likely to report an increased difficulty in their transition (Morin, 2011). While over 50% of post-9/11 veterans reported being married at the time of their first deployment (Park et al., 2021; Wenger et al., 2018) the percentage of Special Forces veterans who were married while deployed or married at discharge is unknown. However, studies that have looked at active-duty Special Forces soldiers estimate their marital rates between 65% (Cooper et al., 2019) and 70% (Skipper et al., 2014). Though this would be considered higher than the number of enlisted soldiers married on active duty, these samples only account for enlisted Special Forces soldiers and are not specific to their marital status at discharge.

Other Social support. Informal social support has also been shown to help ease the stressors of deployments and the experience of transitioning out of the military. Studies have revealed that social support from civilian sources is essential for veterans to thrive in the civilian culture (Wesselmann et al., 2018). Social support by civilians is imperative for veterans to do well in the civilian culture and may help veterans better resolve social and identity difficulties that can occur during the transition (Castro et al., 2015; Hourani et al., 2012; Wesselmann et al., 2018). Elliot (2015) found in their sample of (n=626) military veteran college students that social support from both current veteran and non-veteran friends, as well as family, was a key resource in reducing symptoms of depression, PTSD, and was negatively associated with problematic experiences on campus. Interestingly, Elliot also found that this support was not limited to military friends the participants served with stating specifically, "this study did not find any lasting mental health benefits of the social support received from those with whom the students most recently served" with (Elliot, 2014, p. 17). Williams (2016) found similar results in their sample of military veteran college students in that having a spouse or dependent child was a positive predictor of cumulative GPA with participants from four-year institutions.

Deployment and Combat Experiences

Deployment and combat experiences vary wildly depending on a service member's MOS, unit of assignment, the location of their deployment, and the combat environment to which they were deployed. Deployments and combat experiences were identified as a recurring theme in the study of the military-to-civilian transition

experience. Veterans with a deployment history and, for some, serving in combat, had

an inconsistent relationship with the veteran and their transition out of the Army.

Unfortunately, combat and deployment histories were also inconsistently

operationalized. Parker et al. (2019) described a deployment as "being away from their

permanent duty station" which they later broke down further as differing from a

combat experience. They defined combat experience as "having served in a combat

zone and had at least one key combat engagement" (Parker et al., 2019, p. 10). A key

combat engagement is described as at least one of the following.

Did you ever go on combat patrols?

Were you ever exposed to hostile fire or did you ever come under attack?

Did you ever fire your weapon at the enemy?

Did you ever personally witness someone from your unit or an ally unit being

seriously wounded or killed?

While this was clear, no analysis of combat exposure and reported ease of transition

was reported.

Coons (2018) found in the analysis of their veteran sample (n=595) that combat

exposure had no significant correlation with ease of adjustment or satisfaction with

civilian life. Coons acknowledges study limitations in that 1) sample participants had

been discharged from the military for what they felt was too large of a window

(between one and ten years), 2) of the (n=595) sample participants, only 60% or

approximately 357 reported being exposed to combat, 3) combat exposure was

measured dichotomously versus as a scale variable, which could have measured combat

intensity and 4) mentioned that though insignificant, results "trended" in a direction of significance and further analysis was warranted (2018, p. 43). Coons found that the positive impacts of deployments were significantly correlated with an easier adjustment and increased satisfaction with life, which was one of the measures used to describe a successful transition (2018).

Like Coons, Morin (2011) used a dichotomous variable assessment to ask participants if they had or had not served in a combat zone. Morin (2011) found that serving in combat was negatively associated with and accounted for 7% of the reported ease of transition. Further evaluation revealed that experiencing a traumatic event while serving in the military further reduced the veteran's ease of transitioning by an additional 26%.

While Coons, Morin, and Parker et al. focused on traditional veterans, Kukla and colleagues, Morreale, and Elliot focused their study on former service members who transitioned directly into higher education. Kukla et al. (2015) found in their mixed-methods study that service members exposed to combat were more likely to later experience increased occupational or academic challenges. Morreale (2012) found in their study of 175 military veteran college students that academic motivation, or what they described as "encouraging students to be interested in learning, to integrate the value of learning, and to further their confidence" and academic self-concepts which they described as "how students perceive themselves as students" (Morreale, 2012, p. 61) had no relationship with combat exposure. Morreale (2012) used the Keane et al. (1989) Combat Exposure Scale to assess military veteran college student participants'

exposure to combat, which produced a score between 0 and 41 which was later separated into bands of light, light-moderate, moderate, moderate-heavy, and heavy exposure to combat (α=.85). Approximately 33% of Morreale's sample met the criteria for being exposed to moderate to heavy combat and, of those, combat exposure indicated only a weak relationship with academic motivation and self-concept and did not correlate with each other (2012).

Elliott (2015) used a post-deployment clinical assessment tool to assess participants' exposure and intensity to combat. Using structural equation modeling in their analysis of military veteran college students (n=626), found that combat exposure was directly associated with an increased likelihood of problematic experiences on campus. Conversely, Williams (2016) found that combat deployment experiences were an insignificant predictor of cumulative GPA in their study of military veteran college students (n=482). Williams assessed Combat Deployment Experiences as a bivariate while Kribaum et al. (2020) asked participants to quantify how many times they had been deployed, though like Coons (2018), Morin (2018), and Williams (2016), Kribaum and colleagues did not specify on experiences while deployed.

Though outcomes may have varied, these researchers highlight the diversity of the veteran population and how rates of deployments and exposure to combat vary in their impact on their post-deployment experience. What remains consistent is that Special Forces soldiers are often the first service members deployed to high-risk environments and are exposed to more intense combat than traditional conventional service members (Cooper et al., 2019). After nearly 20 years of the Global War on

Terror, it is estimated that SOF operational personnel have up to 15 combat

deployments, individually participating in hundreds of direct-action missions (Frueh et

al., 2020), yet there is no knowledge of its impact on them during their military to

civilian transition.

Transition Preparedness

Service members transitioning out of the military do so with varying degrees of

preparedness (Krigbaum et al., 2020; Kukla et al., 2015; Zogas, 2017). To help active

duty service members prepare for the transition, the Department of Defense designed

the Transitional Assistance Program or "TAP" to develop a plan to identify and address

discharge questions systematically. Originally developed in 1991 as the Army Career and

Alumni Program (ACAP), the program was a response to the systematic downsizing of

the military in the 1980s (Bascetta, 2002; Kamarck, 2018). ACAP lasted from 1991

through 2011 when it was restructured by the Obama administration, the Veterans

Employment Initiative Task Force, the Department of Defense, and the Department of

Veterans Affairs (Kamarck, 2018). Through counseling and employment assistance, the

Army's current Transitional Assistance Program is designed to help most soldiers

identify skills and resources to facilitate informed career decisions and ensure

competitiveness and success in the civilian workforce (Transiting Assistance Program,

n.d.). Though other areas are covered, helping service members secure post-military

employment, additional education, and benefits continues as the central tenant of the

program (Whitworth et al., 2020). This is because the majority of enlisted service

members join the military shortly after completing high school, complete a single three

or four-year military contract, do not reenlist, and are discharged (Office of the Under

Secretary for Personnel and Readiness, 2017). This is also supported by research

conducted by the University of Southern California's School of Social Work, which found

in four study sites (Los Angeles, Orange Country, California, Chicago, and San Francisco)

that employment was the most pressing issue related to the military to civilian

transition (Castro et a., 2014; Castro et al., 2015; Kintzle et al., 2016; Castro et al., 2017).

Although portions of the TAP are elective, the foundational courses are mandatory, yet

there remains a general misunderstanding of expectations after military service and an

overall lack of preparedness for the military-to-civilian transition (Kintzle, 2017). This

means many service members leave the military without a definitive employment,

housing, or financial plan (Kintzle, 2017).

It is also important to consider the path a service member took to discharge.

Understandably, the majority of service members who do not reenlist are discharged or

separated after the completion of their initial service obligation (Personnel Separations,

2021). Other service members are separated for administrative reasons such as

retirements, failing to meet body composition performance standards, misconduct,

substance use, or those who select to be discharged because of a pregnancy or family

needs. These do not include service members referred to and subsequently discharged

as a result of a Medical Evaluation Board. While all of these examples involve their own

intricacies, it is important to note that all discharges are not the same. Though most

service members will exit the military under "honorable" conditions, a "dishonorable" or

"other than honorable" discharge may also come with negative implications.

Additionally, different paths toward military discharge result in differing timelines. For example, a service member who was recently injured and unexpectedly medically discharged may have less time to prepare for discharge than service members who have finished their contracts and chosen not to reenlist (Chopade & Gupta, 2020). Similarly, research on professional athletes found that those who planned to leave their sport reported an easier experience than those who did not (Young et al., 2006).

Furthermore, one should weigh the service member's personal goals and interests in remaining in the military. Service members who did not originally choose to be discharged, such as those separated as a result of a reduction in force, medical separation, or separated because of administrative or legal issues, often have more difficulty with this transition (Chopade & Gupta, 2020; Coll & Weiss, 2013; Zoli et al., 2015). Despite improvements to the TAP in recent years, service member engagement is often too close to their date of discharge to reap the full benefits of the program (Zogas, 2017).

When generalizing veterans' experiences at discharge, Parker et al. (2019) used a single Likert-style question to assess how well a participant felt the military prepared them for transition to civilian life. They found that almost half (45%) of their sample of (n=1087) military veterans felt the military did not prepare them sufficiently for their transition into civilian life and that (47%) found the transition difficult.

The researchers who conducted the Global SOF Foundation's SOF for life survey (2021) surveyed 477 soldiers and officers who at some point served in a Special Operations unit. Of those who responded to this question (n=367), they found that

almost half (48.4%) felt they had created a comprehensive plan before their discharge while 62% of respondents reported feeling anxious about their financial preparedness at and during their transition.

Coons (2018) measured (n=595) participants' perception of the effectiveness of discharge training through an eight-item Likert style assessment (α=.92) and found through regression and path analysis that discharge training was significantly and positively correlated with a reported easier transition and increased satisfaction with life. Coons also reported this question as having the most variability, which suggested a lack of standardization in transition programs between military branches.

Knight (2014) was the only researcher whose entire sample was still on active duty. Knight looked to explore differences between career (20 years or more) and non-career (less than 20 years) Army soldiers at discharge in their perceptions of their overall preparedness. While Knight acknowledges the small sample size (n=75), their use of an independent samples *t*-test found no statistical difference in levels of self-assessed separation preparedness. Of note, Knight reported perceiving neither group (those with 20 or more years or those without 20 years of military service) as having "a very high degree of preparedness" for their transition out of the military (2014, p. 42).

This study will further existing research while focusing on a unique subpopulation of the U.S. Army. This study expands on the knowledge of Special Forces veterans' levels of education, deployment and combat histories, and their level of preparedness for their transition out of the military. This study will look at these

variables, as well as satisfaction with their civilian employment, relationships, and social

support in how they impacted their transition and current satisfaction with life.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

As we move to understand this process, several theoretical frameworks have

been suggested to help define and describe the military-to-civilian transition experience.

After careful consideration of existing literature, Herbert Simon's (1945) theory of

bounded rationality theory is appropriate to help frame the decision and cognitive

processes involved when service members transition out of the military and reintegrate

into their civilian life.

This conceptual framework was not selected to be used as a predictive model,

nor will this study attempt to test this theory. Instead, the use of this theory will help to

clarify the experience and the intricacies involving the Special Forces veterans

transitioning out of the military by highlighting limitations to human decision-making

behaviors.

Herbert Simon's Bounded Rationality

While the Rational Choice Theory (Smith, 1770) provides a clear framework for

understanding decision-making behaviors, its inability to account for an individual's

limitations in cognitive capacities, access to time, and information (Simon, 1990) to

American economist Herbert Simon's theory of Bounded Rationality. With contributions

to the fields of social science, statistics, and mathematics, Nobel Laureate (economics,

1978) Herbert Simon first presented his decision-making theory in his 1945 book,

Administrative Behavior, which grew into his theory of bounded rationality. Simon

(2000) explains:

> Bounded rationality is simply the idea that the choices people make are
>
> determined not only by some consistent overall goal and the properties of the
>
> external world, but also by the knowledge that decision makers do and don't
>
> have of the world, their ability or inability to evoke that knowledge when it is
>
> relevant, to work out the consequences of their actions, to conjure up possible
>
> courses of action, to cope with uncertainty (including uncertainty deriving from
>
> the possible responses of other actors), and to adjudicate among their many
>
> competing wants (p. 25).

Simon recommended the field of economics align with the field of social sciences,

suggesting that instead of studying economic results, economists should turn their focus

to the information available and used by an individual to make decisions that generated

the results (Cyert, 1979). In other words, instead of trying to predict the shape of jello,

look at the mold being used (Simon, 2000). Bounded Rationality Theory assumes that

humans are goal-oriented but that decisions are made on outcomes that would yield

the highest level of benefits across all objectives (Jones, 1999). Simon believed that

people likely wanted to make rational choices, but that they do not always do so (Jones,

1999).

"The best is the enemy of good" (Voltaire, 1746). Simon expanded on the idea

that an individual's preoccupation with identifying the best decision does not equate to

the most utilitarian, or maximization of returns, but that the decision of a "reasonable

person" is often just as good (Simon, 2000). For example, the concept of living in a safe

community or living a long life. The goal of maximizing community safety may

unintentionally result in limiting individual rights and living longer may also mean

suffering in a life of pain or having to give up certain freedoms (Álvarez & Echeverría,

2008). As part of this decision-making strategy, Simon presented the concept of *satisfice*

or *satisficing* (1956) a combination of satisfying and sufficing. He frames this as when an

individual "has neither the senses nor the wits" (Simon, 1956, p.136) to maximize a

decision, but will identify one that is sufficient and will allow them to satisfy their goal/s

(Simon, 1945; Simon, 1956).

While there are several factors to consider when applying the theory of bounded

rationality to transitioning service members, Figure 1 below may provide a window into

its application and the natural limits in making an informed decision, focusing on limits

to *information*, *cognition*, and *time*

Figure 1

Bounded Rationality Theory
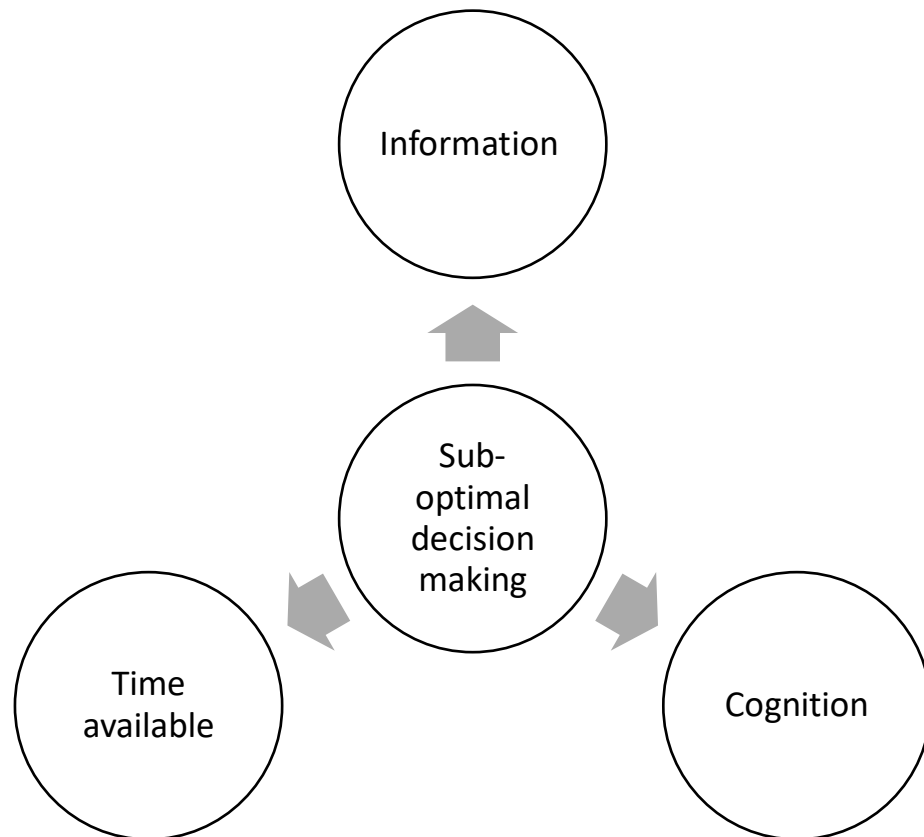
Note. This figure is based on the tenants of Herbert Simon's Bounded Rationality theory of human decision-making.

Information

There is too much information available, and it would be impossible to synthesize it all and decipher what is complete, what is accurate, and what is relevant. To help illustrate this, this study refers to a quote by former U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, who once said in a 2002 Defense Department briefing: "there are

known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say, we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns; the ones we don't know, we don't know" (Rumsfeld, 2002). Last, we can add unknown knowns - information we have but do not know is relevant.

Known knowns. (Things we know we know). Service members preparing to be discharged from the military have many significant decisions to consider from where they will go if they choose not to stay near their current place of duty, what they will do for employment, and how this impact their family (if applicable), etc. Depending on the veteran's age, years of service, level of education, and marital and familial status, the answers to these questions vary dramatically (Parker et al., 2019). The need for answers to these questions is usually quite obvious, so much so that post-military employment, education, and benefits are the primary focus of the current Transition Assistance Program (Whitworth et al., 2020).

Known unknowns. (We know there is some information that we don't know). Even when a SM has confirmed where they will live and has secured employment, they are also aware that there are many unknowns involved in the transition. How will their personality fit in with a new job and will they even like it? The veteran acknowledges that not all questions will be identified or answered.

Unknown unknowns. (Information we don't have and don't know we might need). For the transitioning service member, this is an enormous limitation and blind spot. One way service members can address this is to surround themselves with others who have already transitioned. Ahern and colleagues (2015) found that having a peer

mentor, someone who could help them navigate benefits such as V.A. healthcare or the

G.I. bill was reported as one of the most common resources in a successful transition.

The peer or mentor can share lessons they learned in areas the transitioning service

member may not be aware of.

Unknown knowns. (Information we have but do not know it is relevant). Many

service members have reported feeling frustrated with accurately interpreting their

military training and experience in a way that they can leverage toward civilian

experience (Ahern et al., 2015; Geraci et al., 2020; Zogas, 2017). They may be unaware

of the value a skill, training, or experience has in a civilian context and lose out on

capitalizing on this advantage. Something that seems insignificant at the time may play a

key role in a new place of employment or environment.

To help visualize the concepts of limitations to information within bounded

rationality, consider Figure 2, a modified version of the *Johari Window Model*. This

model illustrates the

Figure 2

Modified Johari Window Model

	Known to self	Not known to self
Known needs	Known knowns (Things we know we know)	Unknown knowns (Information we have, but do not know is relevant)
Unknown needs	Known unknowns (Things we know we don't know)	Unknown unknowns (Information we do not have and do not know we might need)

Note. The Johari window was originally conceptualized by psychologists Joseph Luft and

Harry Ingham (Luft, J., & Ingham, H., 1961).

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These descriptions and the use of the modified Johari Window help to encapsulate the human limitations in accessing and synthesizing all information available to make good decisions through the use of bounded rationality. While these highlight limitations to information, it does not address cognitive limitations.

Cognition

In addition to information, the second human limitation of decision-making is cognition (Álvarez & Echeverria, 2008). Individuals, or transitioning service members, have a finite cognitive ability and are simply unable to consider and process all variables, courses of action, and outcomes and will, as a result, use shortcuts such as satisficing to identify a less-than-optimal solution. Even for those service members who elect to participate in only the minimum mandatory portion of the traditional Transiting Assistance Program, they will still receive individual transition counseling and briefings on healthcare and education benefits by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and briefings on employment by the U.S. Department of Labor (Kamarck, 2018). Though this is the minimum, it remains an enormous amount of individually specific information. Issues like enrolling in V.A. healthcare and educational benefits are unique to a service member's intended geographic location post-discharge, and according to any specific medical needs they may have, which can result in a significant cognitive load. Cognitive limitations must also consider the actual intelligence of the individual and their current level of stress, which will influence their decision-making capabilities. While acknowledging limitations in accessing information and cognitive abilities, time remains a finite resource that must be considered including its influence on decision-making.

Time

   The third and final aspect of decision-making, as outlined by bounded rationality

theory (Simon, 1956), is the component of time. For the transitioning service member,

time may limit their ability to access information or other support resources. While

service members are encouraged to formally enroll in the Transition Assistance Program

no later than 12 months before their date of discharge, they are only required to

participate in four days of briefings (Defense Visual Information Distribution Service,

2019). As stated, these four days are filled with a myriad of briefings on healthcare and

education benefits provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and

employment provided by the U.S. Department of Labor (Kamarck, 2018). While many

updates to the Transitional Assistance Program have been made, many service

members still, do not participate in these briefings until only weeks before their

discharge, when they also may find themselves distracted by thoughts of their future

while receiving this information (Zogas, 2017). Keeling and colleagues (2018) also found

time as a reoccurring theme in their study of transitioning veterans, citing actual time to

prepare and an environment that supports a veteran's decision to transition out of the

military as a barrier to a successful transition. Though participants acknowledge the

preparation process as an individual responsibility and mention how a lack of motivation

may have been a factor for them, the authors found that a majority of their participants

had generally not prepared or were under-prepared for the experience (Keeling et al.,

2018).

The concept of bounded rationality refers to our limited ability to make comparisons and to accurately envision the future. The theory acknowledges the fact that human beings have limitations on time, information, and cognitive ability, which affects their decision-making abilities or their ability to identify the best decision (Cyert, 1979). Simons suggests that our preoccupation with identifying the best decision or most utilitarian decision, with the highest maximization of returns, often leads to a poorer decision and that the decision of a "reasonable person" will be just as good (Simon, 2000).

Cultural adaptation also serves as an important focus and, in addition to being discussed further using Bourdieu's field theory, is also seen in bounded rationality theory (Simon, 2000). For the transitioning service member, decisions may be viewed through the lens of the military culture as the individual may be unfamiliar with the current civilian culture or the culture of their future civilian employment. Simon describes this mismatch as "bounded rationality showing through" (Simon, 1996). Bounded rationality uses a set of assumptions about our learning, adapting, and information-processing in decision-making (Cyert, 1979). By viewing the transitional experience through the lens of bounded rationality theory, researchers can better recognize the enormity and finality of the decision and process made by a service member to transition out of the military.

Chapter Two Conclusion

Herbert Simon's theory of Bounded Rationality was not selected to be used as a predictive model, nor was it the intent of this project to test this theory. Rather, this

theory was identified to help create a conceptual framework for clarifying and improving the understanding of Special Forces veterans transitioning out of the military. As needs in transition vary based on the individual (Chopade & Gupta, 2020, Zogas, 2017), the process of transitioning into civilian life following military service can be difficult and stressful (Elnitsky et al., 2017) and requires a lens that can provide the viewer with a clear perspective of the experience. Bounded rationality provides the researcher with a framework for understanding human decision-making behaviors and the limitations of time, access to information, cognitive load, and the impacts of the military as a culture. Further, it can help to clarify how follow-on decisions, such as where they will live and what they will do when they discharge from the military, can be challenging questions with many secondary effects.

Understanding this process for service members with unique backgrounds is essential for those who work in veteran service organizations or who work directly with transitioning veterans; as it may also be appropriate for those employers looking to hire Special Forces veterans or for those veterans themselves in helping them to normalize the process. This study aims to build on previous research and expand the knowledge of the Special Forces veteran and their experience in transitioning out of the military.

Chapter Three- Methodology

Researchers have identified military occupation as an important variable associated with differences in exposure to combat, mental health diagnosis, and issues related to social support (Frueh et al., 2020; Gubata, et al., 2013; Pitts et al., 2013; & Pitts et al., 2014; Ursano et al., 2017) yet our knowledge of how this and other variables impact the military-to-civilian transitional experience of Special Forces veterans remains unknown. Through the use of an internet survey, this quantitative study explored the military-to-civilian transition of Special Forces veterans. This study had two aims. The first was to determine the contribution of life experiences and demographic characteristics, such as levels of civilian education and employment, relationships and social support (marital or parental status), deployment histories (number of deployments, type, combat trauma, etc.) and transitional preparedness had on reported ease of readjustment to civilian life in a sample of Special Forces veterans. With the same sample, the second aim was to explore differences in participant scores in satisfaction with life with the same predictor variables, though in this question, reported ease of transition was added as an additional predictor variable. To meet these research aims, this chapter provides a thorough description of the study's methodology through four subsections, which include participants, instruments and description of data, procedures, and statistical analysis (Heppner & Heppner, 2004).

Participants

Participants for this study consisted of veterans who, while serving in the U.S. Army, Army National Guard, or United States Army Reserve, between 1952 to present,

completed the Special Forces Qualification Course (SFQC) or what was previously known

as the Special Forces Course, authorizing them to wear the "Green Beret" and after

1982, the "Special Forces" tab. Participation was not limited to those who served in

combat or for a minimum duration of service. Study participants completed an

anonymous online survey where they were asked to complete a myriad of questions

soliciting demographic characteristics including their age at entry into the military, age

attended the SFQC, years of service, rank at discharge, race, and ethnicity, marital and

parental status, levels of education, deployment experiences, time in service, and

previous military occupation. While gender was not asked and not the focus of this

study, it was assumed that all participants were male, as since the first SFQC only three

females have completed the course, one in 1980 and two in 2020, who continue to

serve on active duty (Black, 2021). This study acknowledges that Special Forces soldiers

currently in the transition process may have participated in the survey. Participants in

the transition process who were currently on active duty were identified and given an

abbreviated version of the survey.

Participant and Data Protection Plan

This study followed policies for the protection of human subjects presented in

title 45 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) part 46 (Protection of Human Subjects,

2018). In meeting previous coursework requirements, this study received approval from

the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Kentucky. Participation was

voluntary and without coercion. Participants were able to stop at any time throughout

the survey. Access to the survey was gained through both hyperlinks and QR codes that

guided participants directly to the survey cover letter. In the cover letter, participants

were given information on informed consent (Appendix B), which they must have

acknowledged before proceeding with the survey. The cover letter included the purpose

of the study and the expected time to complete the study. Participation in the survey

was anonymous. All participants were notified in the informed consent that no

personally identifying or healthcare information would be collected, including

participant device IP addresses. All survey data were secured within the Qualtrics

software. Data were password protected and access was limited to the researcher and

Qualtrics staff. Qualtrics software meets U.S. government security compliances and is

FedERamp authorized (Qualtrics, 2021a). All data transmitted on Qualtrics was

conducted through Transport Layer Security (TLS) encryption or HTTPS (2021b).

Instruments and Description of Data Collection Procedures

An internet survey was selected as the data collection method for this study

because of its low cost and ability to quickly access this diverse but largely difficult-to-

reach Special Forces veteran population (Pew Research Center, 2021; Heppner &

Heppner, 2004). The survey was developed using Qualtrics version XM software

(Qualtrics, 2021b) making it accessible through a personal computer, tablet, or

smartphone. Item response randomization was not used. Adaptive questioning or skip-

and-display logic was used. Depending on participant responses, the survey contained

approximately 60 questions, varying from multiple-choice to short answer, to Likert-

style responses. The Qualtrics "Expert Review" bot was used to ensure the survey was

technical functionality. A completion bar, with the percentage completed, was added

and displayed at the top of the screen throughout the entirety of the survey. Recruitment and data collection were opened after receiving IRB approval, on April 6, 2022, and remained open through September 26, 2022.

Survey Reliability and Validity

A majority of the questions in this instrument were used by previous studies which also focused on veterans' transition. While some were expanded upon to elicit additional information, this study claims to have met face and content validity. Additional validity was met through expert review and consultation with former Special Forces veterans to clarify language and readability for questions specific to an audience of Special Forces veterans.

Social desirability bias was addressed by clarifying language to participants that study participation was voluntary and anonymous. Though there are few ways to control for the halo effect, where participants may attempt to respond in a way that makes them feel good or desirable, the author addressed the issue in two ways. First, participation was voluntary, and second, as participants are no longer in the military, pressure to minimize or under-report problems may have been removed as there are no longer any perceived or real occupational risks to their service records.

Operational Definitions of Variables

Variables were divided into outcome and predictor variables. Outcome variables included the participants' reported ease of transition and satisfaction with life. In addition to demographic variables, predictor variables included the participant's level of

civilian education, employment satisfaction, relationships and social support, deployment and combat experiences, and transitional preparedness.

Outcome Variables

Both outcome variables, ease of transition and satisfaction with life, derive a single factor from multi-item scales. Participants were given Likert-style response options to these items. An aggregation of item values creates the total score for each outcome variable.

Ease of Transition. Transitioning into civilian life was measured through the use of a modified version of the Coons' 8-item adjustment to civilian life index (Coons, 2018). Coons found in their sample of 591 veterans who had been discharged within the past ten years that this scale had a high internal consistency reliability estimate—an coefficient alpha of .90 (Coons, 2018). In this study, participants were asked, "after your military service, would you say," followed by up to seven items (based on the participant's previously reported marital, parental, educational, or occupational status), "your readjustment to civilian life was," "your readjustment to your relationship with your family of origin (parent/s and sibling/s) was," "your financial readjustment was," [if applicable] "your readjustment to your relationship with your spouse was," "your readjustment to your relationship with your child(ren) was," "finding a job was," "going to school was." Response options consisted of a five-point Likert-style response for each item (5= *very difficult*, 4= *somewhat difficult*, 3= *neither easy nor difficult*, 2= *somewhat easy*, and 1= *very easy*). Scores could range from 8 through 35, with lower scores indicating an easier transition and higher scores indicating a harder transition. The

overall variable measuring ease of transition was operationally defined as the participant's aggregate score on this ease of transition scale.

Satisfaction With Life was measured with the Satisfaction With Life Scale. Developed in 1985 (Diener et al.) the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) is a five-item scale designed to measure global satisfaction (Krigbaum et al., 2020). The scale asks respondents to note their agreement with five statements, "in most ways, my life is close to my ideal"; "the conditions of my life are excellent"; "I am satisfied with my life"; "so far I have gotten the important things I want in life"; "if I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing." The scale uses seven Likert-style response options for each, (1- *strongly disagree*, 2- *disagree*, 3- *slightly disagree*, 4- *neither agree nor disagree*, 5- *slightly agree*, 6- *agree*, 7- *strongly agree*). The operational definition of satisfaction with life is based on participant SWLS total scores following scoring guidance from the authors. Scores can range from 5 to 35, 5-9 indicating extreme dissatisfaction with life, 10-14 dissatisfied, 20 neutral, 21-25 slightly satisfied, 26-30 satisfied, and 31-35 indicating extreme satisfaction with life (Diener, 2021). The SWLS has also been found to have a high internal consistency reliability estimate. Using samples of undergraduate college students, Diener and colleagues (1985) and Adler & Fagley (2005) found a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .85$ and $\alpha = .87$ respectively. More recently, Coons (2018) found an $\alpha= .91$ in her sample of military veterans.

Predictor Variables

Education. Civilian education was assessed through the use of an ordinal variable that measured the participant's self-reported civilian educational status. Participants

were given a drop-down box and asked to report their level of civilian education at three

points in time; before entering the military, at discharge, and currently. Civilian

education was operationally defined as the participants' ordinal level response: 1= *Less*

than 12 years (some high school, no diploma), 2= 12 years (*high school diploma or GED*),

3= 13 years (*1 year of college, no degree*), 4= 14 years (*2 years of college or trade school*,

often an associates degree), 5= 15 years (*3 years of college or trade school*), 6=16 years

(*4 years of college, often a bachelor's degree*), 7= 17 years (*5 years of college, often a*

bachelor's degree, or pursuing a master's degree), 8= 18 years (*6 years of college, often*

a master's degree), 9= 19 years, 10= 20 years, 11=21 years, 12= 22 years, 13= 23 years,

14=24 years or more.

Employment Satisfaction was assessed with a scale similar to the earlier one

measuring satisfaction with life (Judge et al., 1994; Judge & Klinger, 2008). An

abbreviated five-item version of the 18-item Job Satisfaction Scale (Brayfield & Roth,

1951) was selected because of its brevity and high level of internal consistency. Judge et

al. (1994) used the five-item version for their research into job satisfaction and, when

used on a sample of 222 university employees, found an internal consistency reliability

of α = .88 (1998) and when used in a sample of 424 working adults from a Midwest city

(ages 24-58) found an alpha of .86 (Judge et al., 2000). Hochwarter and colleagues

(2003) reported an α = .86 when they used the same five-question version in their

sample of 311 employed and part-time students from a large southeastern university.

Participants in this study who identified as employed were given the five-item

scale; "I feel fairly satisfied with my present job"; "Most days I am enthusiastic about my

work"; "Each day at work seems like it will never end"; "I find real enjoyment in my work"; and "I consider my job to be rather unpleasant." Questions were delivered in a matrix table with a seven-point Likert style response; (1= *strongly disagree*, 2= *disagree*, 3= *slightly disagree*, 4= *neither agree nor disagree*, 5= slightly agree, 6= *agree*, 7= *strongly agree*). Items three and five are reverse-scored. Scores could range from 5 to 35, with higher scores indicating higher satisfaction with employment.

Relationships and Social Support. This predictor variable was constructed from three sub-measures. Survey participants were initially asked whether they were married while on active duty (Morin, 2011; Parker et al., 2019) and scored as yes=1, no=0. Next, they were asked to describe their marital status with options; 0=*single/never married*, 1= *1st marriage*, 2= *2nd marriage*, 3=*3rd marriage*, 4=*4th or more*, and 5=*currently divorced.*

Participants are then asked to identify which factors were important in their transition out of the military and then given choices; "friendships"(civilian), "family," "finding satisfying work," "friendships" (military), and "relationship with spouse," "mental health," physical health" and "other." Social support selections included "friendships"(civilian), "family," "friendships" (military), and "relationship with spouse" These four questions were each scored as yes=1, no=0.

The last relationship and social support question asked participants to rate the degree of emotional and practical support they received from family, friends, military supervisors, and military coworkers (Russell et al., 2016). Response options for each comprised of 0= "*none*," 1= "*a little*," 2= "*a moderate amount*," and 3= "*a great deal*."

Scores could range from 0 to 3, with higher scores indicating a higher amount of social

support. Relationship and social support scores are then totaled for each participant.

Total scores could range from 0 to 17.

Each of the three social support sub-measures was run independently in the

regression model.

Deployment and Combat Experiences. Like the predictor variable relationships

and social support, deployment and combat experience is a combination of many

nominal and ordinal variables which were measured independently in the regression

model.

To measure deployments and combat experiences, participants were asked if

they ever served in combat or a war zone. Given a participant's response to this

question, they were then asked to quantify how many combat deployments they had.

Participants were given a drop-down menu with options 1 through 20+. While these

questions clarify a participant's deployment and combat history numerically, they did

not intentionally address the participants' exposure to combat or participation in

combat operations.

Combat exposure was operationalized by using the Parker et al. (2019)

description of a "key combat engagement" (Parker et al., 2019, p.10). This was done by

responded to four (yes/no) questions. 1. "*Did you ever go on combat patrols or*

missions?" 2. "*Were you ever exposed to hostile fire or did you ever come under attack?*"

3. "*Did you ever fire your weapon at the enemy?*" 4. "*Did you ever personally witness*

someone from your unit, or an ally unit being seriously wounded or killed?" (2019) A

response of "*yes*" to any of the four questions would indicate a key combat engagement and that the participant had not only deployed to a combat zone but had a key combat experience. Combat exposure scores were totaled and ranged between 0 and 4.

Participants were then asked to assess the impact or outcomes of their deployment or deployments on their family situation, their chance for promotions and advancement within the military, their physical health, their mental health, and their relationship with their family of origin (Parker, 2019), and for those who cited being married, their relationship with their spouse (Morin, 2011), and for those who reported being parents while deployed, their relationship with their children (Coons, 2018). A five-point Likert-style response was used and scored as 1= extremely negative, 2= somewhat negative, 3= neither positive nor negative, 4= somewhat positive, and 5= extremely positive. Scores for deployment impact/outcomes range between 0 and 35.

The last deployment and combat experience question asked survey participants to report if "*while serving in the military,*" "*were you ever seriously injured while performing your duties,*" "*did you know or serve with anyone who was seriously injured while performing their duties,*" "*did you know or serve with anyone who was killed while performing their duties*" (Morin, 2011; Parker 2019). Response options included; "*Yes, in combat,*" "*Yes, but NOT in combat,*" "*Yes, both in combat and NOT in combat,*" and "*No.*" Participants who reported no combat service were given a modified version of this question that removed the option of being injured in combat.

Transition Preparation. Levels of preparation for service members discharging from the military vary. While some will only participate in the minimum required

services, others will address this process very differently. In addition to the elements of the traditional Transition Assistance Program, other organizations that focus on the unique military subpopulation of SOF soldiers, have developed programs that offer supplemental services such as mentoring, executive coaching, and corporate networking to enhance the transitioning SOF soldier's resources. Transitional preparedness was assessed through multiple questions, creating two sub-variables: time spent preparing for discharge before separation and the use of a transitional assistance program. Participants were first asked, "Approximately how long before your discharge did you start to consider and seriously plan on your transition and life outside the military? Response options included, 1= "*I made no plans for my transition or life after the military,*" 2= "*1-6 months prior to discharge,*" 3= "*6-12 months prior to discharge,*" 4= "*12-18 months prior to discharge,*" 5= "*18-24 months prior to discharge,*" 6= *2-3 years prior to discharge,*" 7= "*3=4 years prior to discharge,*" 8= *More than 4 years prior to discharge.*" They were then asked to select what transitional assistance programs they used before their discharge. Five options included, "*I only sat through what was required or mandatory,*" "*I took full advantage of the standard Army transition assistance programs like ACAP or SFL-TAP (Army Career Alumni Program or Soldier for Life- Transiting Assistance Program),*" "*I engaged in programs or resources hosted by my Special Forces group or SOF unit like…*" (then given a text box), "*I utilized external civilian program like… (Special Forces Charitable Trust, Elite Meet, The Honor Foundation, The Special Forces Foundation, etc.)*" (then given a text box), and "*Other*" (then given a text box). For participants who selected, "*I only sat through what was required or

mandatory," an additional question was given to solicit additional information. These participants were asked why they had only sat through what was required or mandatory and given the response options, "*I already had a solid plan and felt it unnecessary*," "*My unit or supervisors made it hard for me to participate in the programs available*," "*I was retiring and did not plan to return to school or the workforce*," "*I wasn't in a good frame of mind to participate*," "*At the time, I either didn't care or was struggling with the idea of getting out. (please clarify)*," or "*other*" (then given a text box). Transitional preparedness consisted of two different sub-measures. Both ordinal variables, time spent preparing for discharge and the number of transitional assistance programs used are each measured independently in the regression model.

Later, these two variables were consolidated by adding how long in advance the participant began to actively prepare for their transition with the number of transitional assistance programs they used to create a single variable with a score range between 2 (1= "*I made no plans for my transition*" and 1= "*I only sat through what was required*") and 14 (8= more than four years of preparations for discharge and 5= participation in all transitional assistance program options). This transitional preparedness variable was then run separately through the regression model.

Procedures

Sampling Method and Design

As accessing the veteran community can be difficult (Park et al., 2021). A purposeful but non-probability convenience sampling method was used to identify, locate, and recruit potential survey participants. A cross-sectional convenience sample

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of participants was recruited through various internet-based methods, including social media and email. The inclusion criteria for this study was based on participant self-report and were limited to veterans who, while serving in the United States Army, completed the Special Forces Qualification Course. Potential participants were exposed to the survey link through posts (appendix C) on three social media platforms and ten SOF-centric transition assistance and fraternal-style organizations.

Social media sites included two LinkedIn pages, an SF-centric Slack channel, and four Facebook groups associated with Special Forces veterans. While access to the Slack channel *#transition* was limited to vetted Special Forces veterans (approximately 345 members), the LinkedIn pages were open to anyone interested in following the pages. Facebook groups were similar in that while some groups work to restrict non-Special Forces qualified personnel from access, this cannot be guaranteed. Group members (who total over 10,000 followers) read about an opportunity to participate in the survey and were shown a hyperlink and quick response or "QR" code to the survey.

Email invitations were sent to the leadership of ten SOF-centric transition assistance and fraternal organizations. These organizations had agreed to forward the survey hyperlink and QR code to their members and those on their email distribution listserv. Though these organizations focus on supporting SOF personnel, this researcher acknowledges that emails may have been sent to spouses or family members of Special Forces veterans, non-qualified Special Forces direct support veterans or enablers, or veterans from other SOF units such as Rangers and Navy SEALs.

Like the Facebook groups, some non-appropriate potential participants may have been exposed to or felt invited to complete the survey. To prevent this, multiple survey items were created to screen participants for suitability. The researcher also acknowledges that some participants may have been invited to participate through multiple mediums and felt compelled to complete the survey more than once. However, settings within the survey software addressed this, limiting access to once per IP address. For the participants' convenience, an IP address that closed out of the survey would be redirected to where they were last upon reentry. This also reduced the potential problem of participants attempting to take the survey multiple times. Participation incentives were not offered.

Statistical Analysis

Univariate descriptive statistics were used to develop a thorough description of the sample and to create a profile of responders. A series of univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analysis was used to address the research questions associated with this study. Statistical analysis of the survey data was conducted through the use of IBM SPSS Statistics analysis software (Version 28).

The aim of this study was guided by the following questions:

1. Are Special Forces veterans more likely to report an easier readjustment to civilian life based on their experiences and demographic characteristics?

2. Are Special Forces veterans more likely to report differences in their scores on the satisfaction with life index based on their reported ease of readjustment to their civilian life, experiences, and demographic characteristics?

To address these research questions, a linear regression model was used to identify the relative contribution of each predictor variable to the two outcome variables.

Testing of linearity, homoscedasticity, independence of error terms, and normality was done before the model was run to ensure assumptions were met. A second regression model will be conducted with the satisfaction with life variable serving as the outcome variable. The same experience and demographic characteristics served as the predictive variables, though ease of transition was also added as an additional predictor variable. With this additional predictor variable, testing of assumptions were conducted to ensure no violations were present.

Internal consistency for the sample was determined after the data collection was completed through the use of Cronbach's alpha tests. Incomplete surveys or missing data were addressed using pairwise deletion strategies.

Chapter Four- Results

This chapter provides a thorough description and summary of the results and analysis used to address the research questions proposed in the previous chapters of this project. This chapter will first provide a comprehensive description of the study's sample demographic characteristics, followed by an account of the statistical analysis and results. The purpose of this study was to explore the experience of Special Forces veterans after being discharged from the Army and their transition into the civilian world. This study was guided by the following questions:

1. Are Special Forces veterans more likely to report an easier readjustment to civilian life based on life experiences and relevant demographic characteristics?

2. Are Special Forces veterans more likely to report differences in satisfaction with life, based on life experiences and relevant demographic characteristics, including ease of transition?

Univariate Statistics and Demographic characteristics

The study sample is first described by current demographic characteristics, followed by military histories and transition-specific characteristics. The survey was opened and initiated 1654 times. Of that, 1363 met eligibility criteria while also sufficiently completing the survey. The remaining participant's eligibility could either not be confirmed (completing the SFQC) or they completed so few questions within the survey, they were removed. Missing data from the remaining participants n=1363 were addressed during analysis using pairwise techniques within SPSS. Outliers with a standard deviation of plus or minus .05 or more were removed. As described in the

sampling methods and design, the survey was accessed through a variety of links. Just under 70%, (n=933, 68.5%) accessed the survey through the Special Forces Association, 384 (28.2%) through LinkedIn or Facebook, with the remaining approximately 3% accessing the survey through other Special Forces-centric organizations who agreed to share the survey link.

Sample description

Participants ranged in age from 22 to 86 years old (*M*=60, *SD*=14.28). Ages and years of service are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Ages and Years of Service

	n	*M*	*SD*	Min	Max
Age at the time of the survey	1339	59.51	14.28	22	86
Age joined Army	1316	19.7	2.49	17	37+
Age completed SFQC	1233	25.1	3.94	17	37+
Years of military service	1297	19.15	8.62	1	30+
Years of Special Forces service	1358	12.77	7.71	1	30+

Similar to conventional forces, White participants represented a large majority (n=1172, 85.99%) of the racial makeup. Although a majority of the participants were white, there was a diverse racial makeup which is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

Race and Ethnicity

Race and Ethnicity	n	%
Asian	9	0.66%
African American or Black	24	1.76%
Caucasian or White	1172	85.99%
Native American or Alaskan Native	37	2.71%
Pacific Islander	9	0.66%
Total	1363	100.00%
Hispanic or Latino ethnicity	91	7.26%
Total	1254	

Years of civilian education were reported at three points in time, at entry into the military, at discharge, and their current years of civilian education. Study participants ranged in civilian education attainment from less than a high school degree to doctoral degrees. Years of civilian education are reported in Table 3.

Table 3

Years of Education

	At entry		At discharge		Current	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Less than 12 years (some HS, no diploma)	62	4.6	5	0.4	0	0.0
12 years (High school diploma or GED)	620	45.6	134	10.2	29	2.2
13 years (1 year of college or trade school)	196	14.4	143	10.8	52	4.0
14 years (2 years of college or trade school)	163	12.0	209	15.9	120	9.3
15 years (3 years of college or trade school)	32	2.4	86	6.5	75	5.8
16 years (4 years of college)	255	18.8	333	25.3	312	24.2
17 years (5 years of college)	22	1.6	66	5.0	104	8.1
18 years (6 years of college)	6	0.4	270	20.5	358	27.7
19 years	1	0.1	29	2.2	76	5.9
20 years	2	0.1	30	2.3	83	6.4
21 years	0	0.0	2	0.2	18	1.4
22 years	0	0.0	1	0.1	20	1.5
23 years	0	0.0	3	0.2	15	1.2
24 years or more	1	0.1	7	0.5	29	2.2
Total	1360	100	1318	100	1291	100

Participants employed, compared to those retired, are distributed almost equally. As displayed in Table 4, almost 50% of the sample population cited being retired (595, 49.9%) while another almost 50% (n=593, 49.7%) reported some sort of employment, and a small portion of the sample (n=60, 5%) identified as current students.

Table 4

Current Employment Status

	Responses		% of
	N	%	Cases
Full-time student	38	2.9%	3.2%
Part-time student	22	1.7%	1.8%
Full-time employment	457	34.8%	38.3%
Part-time employment	136	10.4%	11.4%
Retired	595	45.3%	49.9%
Unemployed	66	5.0%	5.5%
Total	1314	100.0%	110.2%

Marital status varied. Almost 80% (84.8%) reported being married at the time of the survey. Marital histories included 621 (45.6%) who remain married to their first and only spouse and 385 (26.3%) who reported being in their second marriage, while 175 (12.9%) reported being in their third or more marriages. Others, 161 (11.8%) reported being currently divorced, and 40 (2.9%) reported no marital history.

Military history

As described in Table 1, participants reported joining the Army between 17 and 37 or more years old, though the average age at the time of joining was 19.7 years old (n=1316, *SD*=2.49). This was consistent with the span of ages participants completed the Special Forces Qualification Course, though the mean increased to 25.1 years old (n=1233, *SD*=3.94). Participants reported entering the military between 1959 and 2015 and ranged in years of military service and years in Special Forces assignments from 1 year to more than 30 years. Years of military service averaged 17.79 years (n=1297, *SD*=8.62) while years in Special Forces were slightly less, averaging 14.58 years (n=1358,

SD=7.71). Over 80% of survey participants reported being married while on active duty

and over 60% reported being parents, the results of which are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5

Marital and Parental Status While on Active Duty and Deployed

	Yes		No	
	N	%	N	%
Married while on active duty	1097	80.50%	264	19.4
Married while deployed	889	65.20%	89	6.5
Parent while on active duty	858	62.90%	487	35.7
Parent while deployed	686	50.30%	99	7.3

Active-duty service, in addition to attending the SFQC (referring to a guardsman

or reservist whose only active duty time was in the SFQC), was not always the norm. Just

64% of participants reported only serving on active duty while the remaining served in a

combination of components, including active duty, National Guard, or Army Reserve

Special Forces units. Participants served in all Special Forces military occupations,

including the Special Forces warrant and commissioned officers, operations sergeant,

weapons, communication, engineer specialists, and medical and intelligence sergeants.

Military occupations are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6

Special Forces Military Occupations held

Occupation	N
Detachment Commander	252
Weapons Sergeant	217
Engineer Sergeant	201
Medical Sergeant	200
Communications Sergeant	223
Intelligence Sergeant	267
Operations Sergeant	250
SF Warrant Officer	72
Pre-18 series and "S"	595

Though most (n=794, 58.3%) served in a single Special Forces military

occupation, over 20% (n=291, 21.3%) held two, and another 20.4% (n=178) experienced

three or more Special Forces military occupations.

While many participants served in multiple Special Forces occupations, they also

served in multiple positions based on their rank. As displayed in Table 7, the ranks of

participants highlight the broad representation of survey participation, including

officers, enlisted service members, and warrant officers. Participant ranks at discharge

ranged from Specialist (E-4) to Major General (O-8).

Table 7

Participant Ranks at Discharge

	Paygrade	Rank	n	%	Total %
Enlisted and	E-4	Specialist	9	1.16%	0.69%
Non-	E-5	Sergeant	123	15.91%	9.44%
commissioned	E-6	Staff Sergeant	107	13.84%	8.21%
officers	E-7	Sergeant First Class	188	24.32%	14.43%
	E-8	Master Sergeant	217	28.07%	16.65%
	E-9	Sergeant Major	129	16.69%	9.90%
Total enlisted			773	100.00%	
Commissioned	O-2	1st Lieutenant	17	3.88%	1.30%
officers	O-3	Captain	79	18.04%	6.06%
	O-4	Major	115	26.26%	8.83%
	O-5	Lieutenant Colonel	141	32.19%	10.82%
	O-6	Colonel	82	18.72%	6.29%
	O-7	Brigadier General	2	0.46%	0.15%
	O-8	Major General	2	0.46%	0.15%
Total officers			438	100.00%	
Warrant	W-1	Warrant officer	1	1.09%	0.08%
officers	W-2	Chief Warrant officer 2	18	19.57%	1.38%
	W-3	Chief Warrant officer 3	29	31.52%	2.23%
	W-4	Chief Warrant officer 4	36	39.13%	2.76%
	W-5	Chief Warrant officer 5	8	8.70%	0.61%
Total warrants			92	100.00%	
Grand Total			1303		100.00%

Note. Within those who served as commissioned officers, 56.16% (n=246) also served as

enlisted with a mean of 6.16 years.

Few participants (n=191, 14%) reported no service in a combat or war zone. Of

those who served in combat zones (n=1000), the number of deployments ranged from 1

to 20 or more (m=3.72, SD=3.02). Participants in this study account for a total of 3716

combat deployments. The number of deployments to a combat or war zone is displayed

in Table 8.

Table 8

Number of Deployments to a Combat or War Zone Reported by Participants

Number of deployments	n	%
Did not answer	172	12.62
0	191	14.01
1	235	17.24
2	213	15.63
3	140	10.27
4	130	9.54
5	77	5.65
6	63	4.62
7	39	2.86
8	35	2.57
9	23	1.69
10	15	1.10
11	2	0.15
12	7	0.51
13	5	0.37
14	2	0.15
15	3	0.22
16	3	0.22
17	3	0.22
19	1	0.07
20+	4	0.29
Total	1363	100.00

Participants reported combat deployments to Afghanistan (n=555, 41.2% of

cases), Iraq (n=475, 35.2% of cases), Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm (n=212,

15.7% of cases), and Vietnam (n=304, 22.6% of cases). The remaining (n=638, 47.3% of

cases) reported other locations including Africa, Algeria, Bahrain, Beirut, Bosnia, Chad,

Cambodia, Columbia, Djibouti, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dominican

Republic, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Grenada, Haiti, Honduras, Iran, Jordan,

Macedonia, Nicaragua, Niger, Kosovo, Korea, Kuwait, Laos, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Mali,

Panama, Papua New Guinea, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia,

South Sudan, Syria, Turkey, Thailand, Uzbekistan, and Yemen.

Transitional Specific Characteristics

Transitioning out of the Army is different for everyone. For many participants,

preparing for this transition started long before their last day of service. As presented in

Table 9, over 30% (n=430, 34.7%) were seriously planning their transition and life

outside the military more than a year before their discharge. Unfortunately, (n=218)

16.8% reported making no plans for their transition or life after the military.

Table 9

Time Spent Seriously Planning for Transition

	n	%
I made no plans for my transition or life after the military	218	16.8
1-6 months prior to discharge	340	26.2
6-12 months prior to discharge	292	22.5
12-18 months prior to discharge	160	12.3
18-24 months prior to discharge	114	8.8
2-3 years prior to discharge	82	6.3
3-4 years prior to discharge	28	2.2
More than 4 years prior to discharge	66	5.1
Total	1300	100.0

As described in previous chapters, standard Army transitional assistance

programs, ACAP or SFL-TAP (Army Career Alumni Program or Soldier For Live-Transition

Assistance Program) have evolved over the years, resulting in varying levels of

participation. In addition to the standard transitional assistance programs, some Special

Forces Groups have established their own internal programs. Programs mentioned by participants included the 3rd SFG META brief, 10th SFG retirement brief/Trojan Legacy, APEX transition, DOD skill bridge, JANUS, OASIS, Pivot program, and SOCOM Care Coalition/Warrior Care Program. Outside organizations have also gotten involved, some of whom have specifically focused on veterans who served in the Special Operations community. These organizations have created programs to help Special Forces veterans capitalize on their talents, training, background, and experience as a valuable addition to the civilian workforce. External programs that were reported included Amazon Military Apprenticeship, American Corporate Partners, Elite Meet, EF Overwatch, Four Block, Hiring Our Heros corporate fellowship, Mount Carmel Veterans Service Center, Project Transition, the Special Forces Charitable Trust, the Honor Foundation, the Special Forces Foundation, the Special Operations Transition Foundation, the COMMIT foundation, the Green Beret Foundation, Tuck Next Step for Veterans and Olympians, Veterati, Vets2industry, Warrior Ethos, and the Wounded Warrior Program. Participants were encouraged to select all programs they took part in, which are displayed in Table 10 which presents a summary of the frequency and percentages of programs used. For various reasons, some participants took part in only the minimum of programs.

Table 10

The Use of Transitional Assistance Programs

	Responses		% of
	n	%	Cases
I only sat through what was required or mandatory.	756	45.7%	59.1%
I took full advantage of the standard Army transition assistance programs like ACAP or SFL-TAP.	352	21.3%	27.5%
I engaged in programs or resources hosted by my Special Forces group or SOF unit like...	121	7.3%	9.5%
I utilized external civilian programs like...	179	10.8%	14.0%
Other…	248	15.0%	19.4%
Total	1656	100.0%	129.5%

Note. Participants were asked to select all that applied.

For various reasons, some participants took part in the minimum number of transitional assistance programs. As almost half of the participants selected "I only sat through what was required or mandatory," elaboration of their explanations are displayed in Table 11.

Table 11

Those Who Selected, "I Only Sat Through What Was Required or Mandatory".

	Responses		% of
	n	%	Cases
I already had a solid plan and felt it was unnecessary.	390	50.1%	54.0%
My unit or supervisors made it hard for me to participate in the programs available.	50	6.4%	6.9%
I was retiring and did not plan to return to school or the workforce.	36	4.6%	5.0%
I wasn't in a good frame of mind to participate. At the time, I either didn't care or was struggling with the idea of getting out.	133	17.1%	18.4%
Other	170	21.8%	23.5%
Total	779	100.0%	107.9%

Note. Participants were asked to select all that applied.

Of those who attended the required programs 50% (n=390, 50.1%) reported having

what they felt was a solid discharge plan, making it feel unnecessary to use anything

additional. Unfortunately, another almost 20% (n=133, 17.1%) cited not being in a good

frame of mind to take part in the transitional services; they stated they either did not

care or were struggling with the idea of getting out.

After being discharged from the military, many veterans choose to return to

school, and this sample was no different. Of those who responded, (n=1179), over 50%

(n=631) pursued additional civilian education after their discharge. Just over 30%

(n=361, 30.6%) attended full time while many others (n=270, 22.9%) attended on a part-

time basis. When asked to describe the experience of returning to school, 27.1% (n=170)

the 629 who responded reported the experience as difficult, while over 50% (n=357,

56.7%) describe the experience as easy. These results are displayed in Table 12.

Table 12

Going to School Was

	N	%
Very easy	192	30.5
Somewhat easy	165	26.2
Neither easy or difficult	102	16.2
Somewhat difficult	106	16.9
Very difficult	64	10.2
Total	629	100.0

One incentive of military service is the V.A. educational benefits, commonly

referred to as the "G.I. bill." Of those who responded (n=1164), 764 (66%) reported

using some portion of their V.A. educational benefits. Interestingly, about one-third

(n=400, 34.4%) reported using no portion of their educational benefits and 349 or 30%

used their educational benefits in their entirety. Changes in levels of civilian education

from entry to discharge to current, are displayed in Table 13.

Table 13

Civilian Education

	At entry		At discharge		Current		US[a]
	N	%	N	%	N	%	%
No diploma or GED	62	4.56	5	0.38	0	0	11.23
High school diploma or GED	620	45.59	134	10.17	29	2.25	29.74
Some college or trade school	196	14.41	143	10.85	52	4.03	17.72
Associate's degree	195	14.34	295	22.38	195	15.1	8.86
Bachelor's degree	277	20.37	399	30.27	416	32.22	20.78
Master's degree	9	0.66	329	24.96	517	40.05	8.01
Professional or doctoral degree	1	0.07	13	0.99	82	6.35	3.65
Total	1360	100	1318	100	1291	100	99.99

[a] U.S. level of education is based on data collected by the U.S. census bureau in 2019

and represents the educational attainment of a male population 18 years and older (U.S.

Census Bureau, 2022).

   While some veterans choose to first pursue school, most eventually returned to

the civilian workforce. Of those who responded, (n=700), 476, or 71.8% reported finding

employment within six months, and 112, or 16.9% within a year. Approximately 50%

(n=577, 52%) described the process of finding civilian employment as easy while 30%

(n=329) described it being difficult. Table 14 describes the level of difficulty in finding

civilian employment after military service.

Table 14

Finding a Job Was

	N	%
Very easy	265	23.9
Somewhat easy	312	28.1
Neither easy or difficult	201	18.1
Somewhat difficult	203	18.6
Very difficult	126	11.4
Total	1110	100.0

When participants were asked to rate on a 1 through 5 Likert scale, how well the military prepared them for the transition, n=538 (44.9%) of the n=1198 who responded, reported: "not well at all." When later asked how useful their military service was in giving them the skills and training they needed for a job outside of the military, n=477 (42.3%) of the n=1128 who responded reported their military service as "very useful."

When asked about which factors were most important in their transition out of the military, social support options included friendships (civilian), family, friendships (military), and relationship with spouse. Within those, family (n=721) was selected more than any other option, followed by their relationship with their spouse (n=556), military friends (n=480), and last, civilian friends (n=401). These results are displayed in Table 15.

Table 15

Factors Important in Transition

| | Responses | | % of |
	N	%	Cases
Friendships (civilian)	401	18.6%	39.7%
Family	721	33.4%	71.4%
Friendships (military)	480	22.2%	47.5%
Relationship with spouse	556	25.8%	55.0%
Total	2158	100.0%	213.7%

Last, participants reported on the degree of emotional and practical support they received from family, friends, military supervisors, and military coworkers in their transition. Family and friends were cited as providing the most help (n=1014, n=1085), while military supervisors were the least (n=355). Military coworkers were cited as providing emotional and practical support less than family and friends, but significantly more than military supervisors (n=771).

Bivariate Statistical Analysis and Results

In order to address the research questions, numerous statistical analyses were conducted. Analysis of the variables follows the order described in Chapter Three. Internal consistency and reliability were first examined on the outcome variables, ease of transition, and satisfaction with life. Several bivariate analysis were then used to test the predictor variables; level of civilian education, employment satisfaction, relationships and social support, deployment and combat experiences, and transitional preparedness to identify any correlation or evidence of a relationship between the two outcome variables. Internal consistency and reliability were also tested for scaled

predictor variables, including employment satisfaction, relationships and social support, deployment and combat experience, and transitional preparation, which are also scaled variables. Last, two multiple regression analysis models were developed based on the results of the bivariate analysis. The level of significance alphas, for all statistics in this study, was α =.05.

The Ease of Transition scale was computed by adding participant responses for each of the items to form a scale. "After your military service, would you say," "your readjustment to civilian life was," "your readjustment to your relationship with your family of origin (parent/s and siblings) was," "your financial readjustment was," your readjustment to your relationship with your spouse was," "your readjustment to your relationship with your child(ren was," "finding a job was," "going to school was," and "navigating the V.A. was." Scores ranged from 2 to 34, with lower scores indicating an easier time readjusting to civilian life and higher scores indicating a harder time readjusting to civilian life (M =16.46, SD = 6.233). Descriptive statistics are displayed in Table 16.

Table 16

Descriptive Statistics of Outcome Variables

	N	*M*	SD	Min	Max
Ease of transition scale	300	16.46	6.233	2	34
3Q Ease of transition scale	1171	8.70	3.134	3	15
Satisfaction with Life scale	1262	13.21	6.281	5	35

Internal consistency and reliability was computed by calculating Cronbach's

alpha reliability coefficient on the scores of participants who responded to all items

(n=300). This resulted in internal consistency and inter-item reliability of α=.79.

To increase the eligible cases for analysis, a three-item version of items common

to all participants was also computed and the reliability coefficient run again. "After

your military service, would you say your readjustment to civilian life was…," "…your

financial readjustment was…," and "…your readjustment to your relationship with your

family of origin was…." Scores from the three-item Ease of Transition scale ranged from

3 to 15 and, though significantly increasing the included cases for analysis to 1171 (*M* =

8.70, *SD* = 3.134), this yielded little change to the alpha (α=.77). Descriptive statistics are

displayed in Table 16. Though lower than what was found by Coons' (n=351, α=.90) in

2018, these results have adequate reliability. As a result of this testing, the three-item

scale was used as the outcome variable for the remainder of the analysis.

Scores from the five-item Satisfaction With Life Scale were totaled and ranged

from 5 to 35 and a mean score of 26.78 (*SD*=6.281). The Satisfaction With Life Scale

displayed a high level of internal consistency and inter-item reliability (α=.89) when

tested on those who completed the scale (n=1262). These findings are consistent with

previously reported findings. The results of this analysis determined these constructs,

ease of transition and the Satisfaction With Life Scale, as having a sufficiently high

internal consistency for their use for this study. Descriptive statistics are displayed in

Table 16.

Civilian Education

Levels of civilian education were reported by years of education. Less than a high school diploma or GED was coded as equal to 1, a high-school diploma or GED was equal to 2, one year of college was equal to 3, and so forth. Scores ranged from 1 to 14, with higher scores indicating higher levels of education. The score of civilian education at discharge from the military ranged from 1 to 14 (*M*=5.55, *SD*=2.270) and current civilian education from 2 to 14 (*M*=7.04, *SD*=2.396).

The One-way ANOVA is an extension of the independent *t*-test and is used to analyze the difference between the means of multiple independent groups (Ho, 2013). A One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) *F*-test was conducted to compare the effect of the participant's level of civilian education at their *time of discharge* from the military on their reported ease of transition. In order for the assumption of normality of distribution to be met, years of civilian education were regrouped categorically at these levels: high school/GED or less, some college, associate's degree, bachelor's degree, and master's degree or higher. These are displayed in Tables 17 and 18.

Table 17

Years of Civilian Education at Discharge (Initial Survey Categories)

	n	%
Less than 12 years (some high school, no diploma)	5	0.4
12 years (High school diploma or GED)	134	10.2
13 years (1 year of college or trade school)	143	10.8
14 years (2 years of college or trade school, often an associate degree)	209	15.9
15 years (3 years of college or trade school)	86	6.5
16 years (4 years of college, often a bachelor's degree)	333	25.3
17 years (5 years of college, often a bachelor's degree, or pursuing a master's degree)	66	5.0
18 years (6 years of college, often a master's degree)	270	20.5
19 years	29	2.2
20 years	30	2.3
21 years	2	0.2
22 years	1	0.1
23 years	3	0.2
24 years or more	7	0.5
Total	1318	100.0

Table 18

Levels of Civilian Education at Discharge (Merged Categories)

	n	%
High school/GED, or less	139	10.5
Some college	143	10.8
Associate degree	295	22.4
Bachelor's degree	399	30.3
Master's degree or higher	342	25.9
Total	1318	100.0

Descriptive statistics for the ANOVA test are displayed in Table 19.

Table 19

ANOVA Descriptive Statistics of Level of Civilian Education at Discharge and Ease of

Transition

	N	*M*	*SD*	Min	Max
High school diploma, GED, or less	125	9.31	3.387	3	15
Some college	129	9.10	3.309	3	15
Associate's degree	262	9.13	3.284	3	15
Bachelor's degree	340	8.69	2.950	3	15
Master's degree or higher	302	7.92	2.916	3	15
Total	1158	8.70	3.146	3	15

The results of the ANOVA are presented in Table 20 and indicate a significant

difference in reported ease of transition and the participant's level of civilian education

at discharge [$F(4,1153) = 7.763$, $p<.001$].

Table 20

ANOVA results of Level of Civilian Education at Discharge and Ease of Transition

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	300.276	4	75.069	7.763	.001***
Within Groups	11149.127	1153	9.670		
Total	11449.403	1157			

***$p<.001$.

These results show that as levels of civilian education climb, scores on the three-

question ease of transition scale go down, meaning that higher levels of civilian

education are associated with a reported easier transition. As displayed in Table 21, post

hoc analysis using the Tukey HSD test for multiple comparisons found that the mean

value of Ease of Transition between those participants with a Master's degree and all

other levels of education was significantly different.

Table 21

Tukey's HSD Output of Level of Civilian Education at Discharge and Ease of Transition

			95% C.I.	
		Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Master's degree	High school or GED	.001***	-2.30	-.49
	Some college	.003**	-2.07	-.29
	Associate's degree	.000***	-1.93	-.50
	Bachelor's degree	.015*	-1.45	-.10

***$p<.001$. **$p<01$, *$p<.05$

A second One-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the effects of the participant's *current* level of civilian education with the outcome variable satisfaction with life. A violation of the ANOVA *F*-test assumption, homogeneity of variance was identified by the Levene's statistic. Welch's ANOVA was used as it has been shown as an appropriate alternative when this violation is present in the One-way ANOVA (Jan & Shieh, 2014). Descriptive statistics for this ANOVA test are displayed in Table 22.

Table 22

ANOVA Descriptive Statistics of Current Level of Civilian Education and the Satisfaction with Life Scale

	N	*M*	*SD*	Min	Max
High school diploma, GED, or less	25	22.4	8.898	8	35
Some college	50	26.7	6.147	9	35
Associate's degree	178	26.0	6.546	9	35
Bachelor's degree	387	27.1	5.986	5	35
Master's degree or higher	566	26.9	6.211	5	35
Total	1206	2638	6.284	5	35

The results of the Welch's ANOVA are presented in Table 23 and show no significant differences in participants' current level of education and satisfaction with life [F_{Welch}(4,122.318) = 2.401, p=.054].

Table 23

ANOVA (Welch) Results of Satisfaction with Life and Current Level of Civilian Education

	Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Welch	2.401	4	122.318	.054

Given these results, current level of civilian education, and satisfaction with life, an additional independent *t*-test was conducted to compare the mean scores of satisfaction with life and those with a bachelor's degree or higher (n=953) and those without (n=253). The results indicate a significant difference in scores on the Satisfaction With Life Scale between those with a bachelor's degree or higher (m=27.02, *SD* =6.117) and those who do not (m=25.82, *SD* =6.808), conditions; [t(1204)= -2.702, p=.007]. This means that those with a bachelor's degree or higher reported higher scores on the Satisfaction With Life Scale, indicating that having a bachelor's degree or higher was associated with higher satisfaction with life than those with less than a bachelor's degree.

Employment Satisfaction

The measure of employment satisfaction consisted of five items. Scores for each of the five items were summed and ranged from 3 to 35 (*M*=21, *SD*= 3.775) with higher scores indicating higher satisfaction with employment. The Employment Satisfaction Scale displayed an adequate to high level of internal consistency and inter-item

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reliability (α=.78). Of the participants who identified as employed (n=593), 457 cited full-

time employment while 136 cited part-time employment. A Pearson Correlation was

conducted to examine the relationship between employment satisfaction and ease of

transition and again between employment satisfaction and satisfaction with life. No

substantial correlation was identified between the variables' employment satisfaction

and ease of transition [r= -.025, n= 575, p= .546]. However, a statistically significant,

negative but weak relationship between the variables employment satisfaction and

satisfaction with life was identified [r= -.17, n= 583, p< .001]. This means that higher

scores in employment satisfaction correlated with higher scores in the satisfaction with

life scale. This is displayed in Figure 3 as a scatterplot.

Figure 3

Correlation Scatter Plot between Employment Satisfaction and Satisfaction With Life
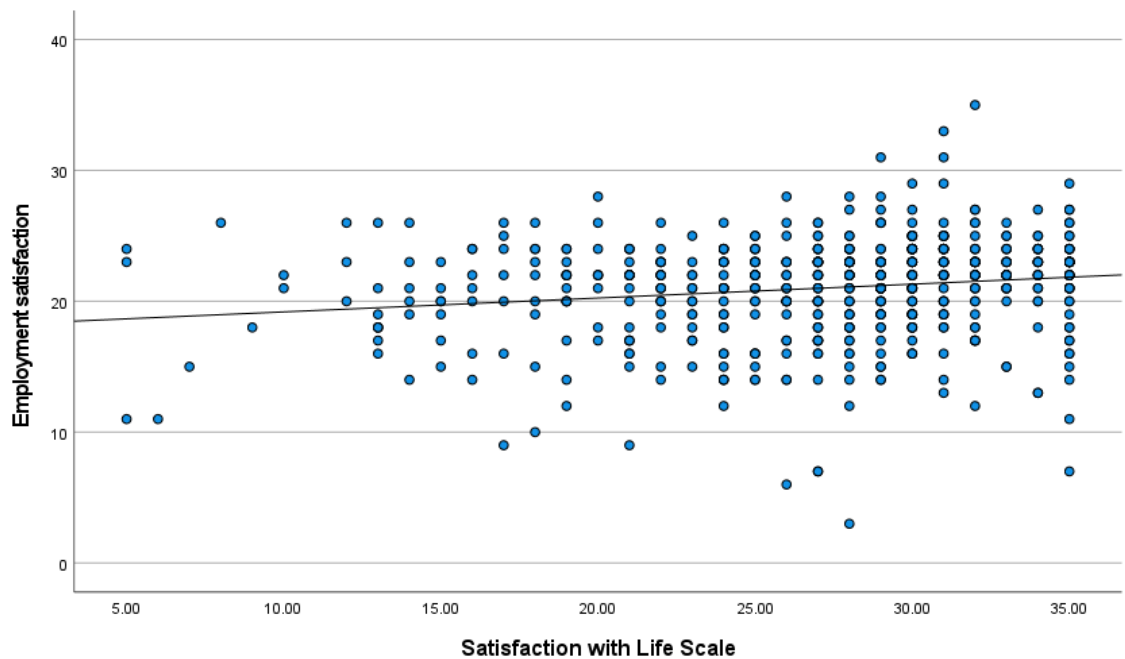
Relationships and social support

Married On Active Duty. Participants were asked if they were married while on

active duty. Of those who responded, 943 reported they were married while on active

duty, while 238 reported they were not. Two independent *t*-tests were conducted to

compare the means of the outcome variable ease of transition and satisfaction with life

between those married while on active duty and those not. There were no significant

differences in ease of transition mean scores between those married while on active

duty (*M*=8.71, *SD*=3.107) and those not married (*M* =8.66, *SD*=3.247) were identified,

conditions; [*t*(1179)= -.210, *p*=.834]. Additionally, no significant differences in

satisfaction with life mean scores were found for those married while on active duty (*M*

=26.82, *SD* =6.220) and those not married (*M* =26.65, *SD* =6.545); [*t*(1270)= -.378,

p=.705].

Current Marital Status. Participants were asked to describe their marital status

with these values: 0=*single/never married*, 1= *1st marriage*, 2= *2nd marriage*, 3=*3rd*

marriage, 4=*4th or more*, and 5=*currently divorced*. The natural range was 0 to 5 (*M*

=2.01, *SD*=1.374). A One-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of the

participant's marital status on their reported ease of transition. Descriptive statistics for

this ANOVA test are displayed in Table 24.

Table 24

ANOVA Descriptive Statistics of Marital Status and Ease of Transition

	N	*M*	*SD*	Min	Max
Single/ never married	34	9.97	3.157	3	15
1st marriage	526	8.39	3.032	3	15
2nd marriage	313	8.83	3.030	3	15
3rd marriage	112	9.41	3.178	3	15
4th marriage or more	48	9.06	3.503	3	15
Currently divorced	141	8.65	3.381	3	15
Total	1174	8.71	3.130	3	15

The results of the ANOVA are presented in Table 25 and show a significant difference in reported ease of transition and the participant's current marital status [F(5, 1168) = 3.612, p=.003].

Table 25

ANOVA results of Ease of Transition and Marital Status

	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	Sig.
Between Groups	175.001	5	35.000	3.612	.003**
Within Groups	11318.201	1168	9.690		
Total	11493.203	1173			

**p<01.

These results show that those in their first marriage reported lower ease of transition scores (inversely scored, lower is better) compared to those participants who reported being single or never married who had higher scores, indicating increased difficulty in transition.

A second One-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of the participant's current marital status on the outcome variable satisfaction with life. Descriptive statistics for the ANOVA test are displayed in Table 26.

Table 26

ANOVA Descriptive Statistics of Marital Status and the Satisfaction With Life Scale

	N	*M*	*SD*	Min	Max
Single/ never married	37	23.02	6.483	10	30
1st marriage	577	27.22	5.890	5	35
2nd marriage	334	27.03	6.498	5	35
3rd marriage	117	27.44	5.748	10	35
4th marriage or more	47	27.39	6.124	11	35
Currently divorced	154	24.88	6.904	5	35
Total	1266	26.79	6.267	5	35

The results of the ANOVA are presented in Table 27 and show a significant difference in marital status and reported satisfaction with life [$F(5, 1260) = 6.663$, $p<.001$].

Table 27

ANOVA Results of Marital Status and the Satisfaction With Life Scale

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1279.839	5	255.968	6.663	.001
Within Groups	48405.428	1260	38.417		
Total	49685.267	1265			

***$p<.001$.

These results show that participants who reported as married reported a higher score on the Satisfaction With Life Scale, meaning a higher satisfaction with life than those who report being single/never married or currently divorced.

Social Support Factors Important in Transition. Participants were asked to

identify all factors important in their transition out of the military. Participant responses

varied from none to all available choices. Social support options included friendships

(civilian), family, friendships (military), and relationship with spouse.

Four independent *t*-tests were conducted to compare the outcome variable ease

of transition with those who selected or did not select each social support factor as

important in their transition. A statistically significant difference in ease of transition

mean scores and those who selected civilian friendships, family, and relationship with

spouse was an important factor in transition. No significant difference was identified

between those who selected military friendships as an important factor in transition and

those who did not. The results of these *t*-tests are displayed in Table 28.

Table 28

t-Test Results of Social Support Factors Important in Transition and Ease of Transition

	N	M	SD	t	df	p	η^2
Friendship (civilian)				1179	4.839	.001***	.019
Selected	392	8.08	3.133				
Did not select	789	9.01	3.091				
Family				1179	4.464	.001***	.017
Selected	709	8.37	3.094				
Did not select	470	9.2	3.134				
Friendships (military)				1179	-1.34	.181	.002
Selected	474	8.55	3.013				
Did not select	707	8.8	3.212				
Relationship with Spouse				1179	-4.015	.001***	.013
Selected	546	8.31	3.068				
Did not select	635	9.04	3.154				

****p*<.001.

Four additional *t*-tests were conducted to compare the outcome variable

satisfaction with life with the previous four predictor variables. A statistically significant

difference was identified in Satisfaction With Life Scale scores and all four predictor

variables. These results are displayed in Table 29.

Table 29

t-Test Results of Social Support Factors Important in Transition and Satisfaction With Life

Scale

	N	M	SD	t	df	p	η^2
Friendship (civilian)				1179	-4.70	.001***	.017
Selected	396	28.01	5.878				
Did not select	877	26.23	6.381				
Family				1271	-3.743	.001***	.011
Selected	709	27.37	5.86				
Did not select	564	26.05	6.706				
Friendships (military)				1271	-2.362	.018*	.004
Selected	475	27.32	6				
Did not select	798	26.46	6.424				
Relationship with Spouse				1271	-3.163	.001***	.008
Selected	545	27.42	5.874				
Did not select	728	26.30	6.532				

***p<.001. *p<.05

The effects of these four factors was also tested on each outcome variable using

the Eta-square test. The results of these tests are also displayed in Tables 28 and 29 in

column η^2, all of which were less than 2%. These results can be interpreted as the effect

the factor had on the corresponding outcome variable. Because of these low

associations, these variables were not included in the regression models.

Next, a scale was created by adding participant responses to the four factors

important in transition questions. Scored as yes=1 and no=0, ranging from a minimum

score of zero to a maximum of 4 (*M*=1.58, *SD*=1.279). Internal consistency and reliability were analyzed by performing Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient (α=.58).

A One-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the reported ease of transition with the factors participants identified as important in their transition. Descriptive statistics for the ANOVA test are displayed in Table 30.

Table 30

ANOVA Descriptive Statistics of Factors Important to Transition and Ease of Transition

	N	*M*	*SD*	Min	Max
0	188	9.51	2.957	3	15
1	319	8.90	3.314	3	15
2	349	8.81	3.099	3	15
3	196	8.14	2.965	3	15
4	129	7.60	2.866	3	13
Total	1181	8.70	3.134	3	15

The results of the ANOVA are presented in Table 31 and show a significant difference in reported ease of transition and the number of factors the participant selected as important to their transition [$F(4,1176) = 9.372$, $p<.001$].

Table 31

ANOVA Results of Factors Important to Transition Ease of Transition

	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	Sig.
Between Groups	385.141	4	89.535	9.372	.001***
Within Groups	11234.945	1176	9.554		
Total	11593.086	1180			

***$p<.001$.

These results show that factors important to social support are associated with a reported easier transition or more plainly, as factors of social support rise, scores of ease of transition go down, meaning an easier transition.

A second One-way ANOVA was conducted to compare reported satisfaction with life with the factors participants identified as important in their transition. A violation of the homogeneity of variances assumption was identified by Levene's statistic and a Welch test was used. Descriptive statistics for the ANOVA test are displayed in Table 32.

Table 32

ANOVA Descriptive Statistics of Factors Important to Transition and Satisfaction With

Life Scale

	N	*M*	*SD*	Min	Max
0	279	25.61	6.916	5	35
1	319	26.24	6.174	5	35
2	349	26.92	6.390	5	35
3	196	27.94	5.383	5	35
4	130	28.50	5.402	5	32
Total	1273	26.78	6.281	5	35

The results of the Welch ANOVA are presented in Table 33 and show a significant difference in reported ease of transition and the number of factors the participant selected as important to their transition [$F_{Welch}(4, 533.174) = 8.009$, $p<.001$].

Table 33

ANOVA (Welch) Results of Factors Important to Transition and Satisfaction With Life Scale

	Statistic	*df1*	*df2*	Sig.
Welch	8.009	4	533.174	.001***

***$p<.001$.

These results show that factors important to social support are associated with their reported satisfaction with life or, more plainly, as factors of social support increase, scores on the Satisfaction With Life Scale also go up, meaning an increased satisfaction with life.

Emotional and Practical support. Last, participants were asked to rate the degree of emotional and practical support they received from family, friends, military supervisors, and military coworkers. Response options for each consisted of 0= *none*, 1= *a little*, 2= *a moderate amount*, and 3= *a great deal*. A scale was computed by summing responses to the four questions resulting in a minimum score of zero and a maximum of 12, with higher scores meaning a higher amount of emotional and practical support (*M*=5.46, *SD*=2.951). Internal consistency and reliability were analyzed by calculating Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient. The results (α=.735) indicated sufficient inter-item reliability. A One-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the reported ease of transition with their scores on the emotional and practical support scale. Descriptive statistics for the ANOVA test are displayed in Table 34.

Table 34

ANOVA Descriptive Statistics of the Number of Factors That Provided Emotional and

Practical Support During Transition and Ease of Transition

	N	*M*	*SD*	Min	Max
0	49	9.33	3.191	3	15
1	58	10.00	3.413	3	15
2	97	10.44	2.869	3	15
3	113	9.73	3.295	3	15
4	154	9.28	2.905	3	15
5	132	8.33	2.897	3	15
6	164	8.34	2.948	3	15
7	109	8.25	3.025	3	14
8	99	8.90	2.894	3	15
9	87	7.52	2.824	3	13
10	56	6.98	2.483	3	12
11	24	6.42	2.685	3	14
12	35	6.66	3.124	3	15
Total	1177	8.72	3.128	3	15

The results of the ANOVA are presented in Table 35 and indicate a significant

difference in reported ease of transition and their score on this emotional and practical

support scale [$F(12, 1164) = 11.382$, $p<.001$].

Table 35

ANOVA Results of the Number of Factors That Provided Emotional and Practical Support

During Transition Ease of Transition

	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	Sig.
Between Groups	1208.294	12	100.691	11.382	.001***
Within Groups	10297.358	1164	8.847		
Total	11505.652	1176			

***$p<.001$.

These results show that as the number of factors and degree of emotional and practical support increases, ease of transition scores decrease, indicating an easier time in transition.

A second One-way ANOVA was conducted to compare satisfaction with life with their score on this emotional and practical support scale. A violation of the homogeneity of variances assumption was identified by the Levene's test and a Welch test was used. Descriptive statistics for the ANOVA test are displayed in Table 36.

Table 36

ANOVA Descriptive Statics of the Number of Factors That Provided Emotional and

Practical Support During Transition Satisfaction With Life

	N	*M*	*SD*	Min	Max
0	49	25.10	7.537	10	35
1	58	24.64	7.529	5	35
2	98	24.02	7.474	5	35
3	114	25.81	6.404	6	35
4	154	25.40	6.953	7	35
5	132	27.42	5.455	7	35
6	163	27.60	5.869	5	35
7	109	27.49	5.707	9	35
8	99	28.08	4.795	13	35
9	88	28.47	4.581	18	35
10	56	27.93	5.708	5	35
11	24	30.13	4.656	19	35
12	35	30.11	4.928	10	35
Total	1179	26.81	6.284	5	35

The results of the ANOVA are presented in Table 37 and show a significant difference in scores on the Satisfaction With Life Scale and scores on the emotional and practical support scale [F_{Welch}(12, 315.495) = 6.337, $p<.001$].

Table 37

ANOVA (Welch) Results of the Number of Factors That Provided Emotional and Practical Support During Transition and the Satisfaction With Life Scale

	Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Welch	6.337	12	315.495	.001***

***$p<.001$.

Like previous tests, these results show that as the number of factors and degree of emotional and practical support increases, scores on the Satisfaction With Life Scale also increase, meaning higher satisfaction with life.

Deployment and Combat Experience

Like the predictor variable relationships and social support, deployment and combat experience is a combination of different nominal and ordinal variables which are measured independently in the regression model.

Combat Service. Participants were first asked if they had served in a combat or war zone. Two independent *t*-tests were conducted to compare the outcome variables' Ease of Transition and then scores on the Satisfaction With Life Scale to those who reported serving in a combat zone and those who did not. The results of these tests show a significant difference in ease of transition mean scores among those who served in combat (n=1011, *M*=8.79, *SD*=3.052) over those who did not (n=170, *M*=8.19, *SD*=3.556), [*t*(1179)= -2.287, *p*=.022]. Inversely, no significant differences were identified

in Satisfaction With Life Scale mean scores between those who served in combat

(n=1104, m=26.69, *SD* =6.337) and those who did not (n=169, *M*=27.40, *SD*=5.878),

conditions; [*t*(1271)= -1.383, *p*=.167].

Two eta-square tests were also run to measure the association of service in a

combat zone (nominal), with ease of transition scale, and again with the Satisfaction

With Life Scale. Only ease of transition produced statistically significant results,

accounting for a relatively small effect of 2.3% [η^2 = .023] of the variability in ease of

transition explained by service in a combat zone.

While the *t*-test results reveal a statistically significant association between those

who served in a combat zone and those who did not in ease of transition, the eta-square

test results show such a low association between combat service and ease of transition

that combat service was not included in the regression model.

Injury and death Survey participants were asked to report if while serving in the

military, "were you ever seriously injured while performing your duties," "knew or

served with anyone who was seriously injured while performing their duties," and

"knew or served with anyone who was killed while performing their duties." Response

options included, *Yes, in combat, Yes, NOT in combat, Yes in both*, and *No*. Six One-way

ANOVA tests were conducted to compare these three questions with each of the

outcome variables. When calculating ease of transition, descriptive statistics and ANOVA

results are displayed in Table 38.

Table 38

ANOVA Descriptive Statistics and Results of "while serving in the military" and Ease of

Transition

	n	*M*	*SD*	Min	Max	F	df	Sig.
Were you seriously Injured						5.813	3,1175	.001***
Yes, in combat	168	8.99	3.206	3	15			
Yes, but NOT in combat	353	8.98	3.043	3	15			
Yes, both in combat and NOT in combat	115	9.31	3.169	3	15			
No	543	8.30	3.127	3	15			
Total	1179	8.70	3.137	3	15			
Knew or served with someone who was seriously injured						1.449	3, 1173	.227
Yes, in combat	593	8.68	3.176	3	15			
Yes, but NOT in combat	136	8.47	3.344	3	15			
Yes, both in combat and NOT in combat	406	8.90	3.012	3	15			
No	42	8.02	3.008	3	14			
Total	1177	8.71	3.137	3	15			
Knew or served with someone who was Killed						2.338	3, 1168	.072
Yes, in combat	649	8.65	3.169	3	15			
Yes, but NOT in combat	95	8.85	3.467	3	15			
Yes, both in combat and NOT in combat	340	8.98	2.956	3	15			
No	88	8.05	3.058	3	14			
Total	1172	8.72	3.131	3	15			

***$p<.001$.

When calculating satisfaction with life, descriptive statistics and ANOVA results are

displayed in Table 39.

Table 39

ANOVA Descriptive Statistics and results of "while serving in the military" and the

Satisfaction With Life Scale

	n	M	SD	Min	Max	F	df	Sig.
Were you seriously Injured						2.053	3, 1267	.105
Yes, in combat	173	26.91	6.454	5	35			
Yes, but NOT in combat	379	26.43	6.115	5	35			
Yes, both in combat and NOT in combat	130	25.89	7.074	6	35			
No	589	27.17	6.140	5	35			
Total	1271	26.78	6.285	5	35			
Knew or served with someone who was seriously injured						1.193	3, 1265	.311
Yes, in combat	637	27.06	6.384	5	35			
Yes, but NOT in combat	137	26.84	5.827	10	35			
Yes, both in combat and NOT in combat	449	26.36	6.188	5	35			
No	46	27.28	6.355	8	35			
Total	1269	26.80	6.257	5	35			
Knew or served with someone who was Killed						2.014	3, 1259	.110
Yes, in combat	700	27.04	6.260	5	35			
Yes, but NOT in combat	95	27.05	6.186	11	35			
Yes, both in combat and NOT in combat	373	26.10	6.487	5	35			
No	95	27.09	5.696	8	35			
Total	1263	26.77	6.290	5	35			

Of the six tests, the only statistically significant difference identified was between those

who while serving in the military were seriously injured while performing their duties

and ease of transition [$F(3, 1175) = 5.813$, $p < .001$].

Number of Combat Deployments. The number of combat deployments

participants reported ranged from 1 to 20 or more (*M*=3.72, *SD*=3.015). A Pearson

Correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between the number of combat

deployments and ease of transition and again between the number of combat

deployments and satisfaction with life. While there was no statistically significant

correlation between the outcome variable ease of transition [r= .036, n= 864, p= .297],

there was a statistically significant, weak, positive correlation between satisfaction with

life and the number of combat deployments [r= -.081, n= 945, p= .013]. This means that

as the number of combat deployments increases, scores on the satisfaction with life

scale reduce. In other words, there is a small relationship between more deployments

and a reduced satisfaction in life.

Key Combat Engagement. Participants were asked to respond (yes/no) to four

questions focused on exposure to combat, 1. "*Did you ever go on combat patrols or

missions*," 2. "*Were you ever exposed to hostile fire or did you ever come under attack*,"

3. "*Did you ever fire your weapon at the enemy*" and 4. "*Did you ever personally witness

someone from your unit, or an allied unit being seriously wounded or killed?*"

Eight total independent *t*-tests were conducted to compare both outcome

variables, ease of transition, and satisfaction with life with each of the four questions. Of

those eight *t*-tests, only one resulted in statistical significance. A significant difference

was identified in ease of transition mean scores between those who reported personally

witnessing someone from their unit or an allied unit being seriously wounded or killed

(n=773, m=8.90, *SD* =3.074) and those who did not (n=226, *M*=8.41, *SD*=2.971), [*t*(997)=

2.127, *p*=.034]. The results of these tests are displayed in Tables 41 and 42.

Table 41

t-Test Results of a Key Combat Engagement and Ease of Transition

	n	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*df*	*p*	η^2
Combat Patrols				1.289	997	.198	.002
Selected	933	8.82	3.062				
Did not select	66	8.32	2.967				
Exposed to Hostile Fire/Enemy Attack				0.246	997	.806	.000
Selected	921	8.79	3.034				
Did not select	78	8.71	3.335				
Fired Weapon at Enemy				1.359	996	.087	.002
Selected	778	8.85	3.054				
Did not select	220	8.54	3.062				
Personally Witnessed Someone being Seriously Wounded or Killed				2.127	997	.034*	.005
Selected	773	8.9	3.074				
Did not select	226	8.41	2.971				

*p<.05.

Table 42

t-Test Results of a Key Combat Engagement and the Satisfaction With Life Scale

	n	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*df*	*p*	η^2
Combat Patrols				-1.293	1090	.196	.002
Selected	1025	26.76	6.256				
Did not select	67	25.73	7.29				
Exposed to Hostile Fire/Enemy Attack				0.334	1091	.739	.000
Selected	1011	26.68	6.319				
Did not select	82	26.92	6.421				
Fired Weapon at Enemy				-0.812	1090	.417	.001
Selected	851	26.78	6.239				
Did not select	241	26.41	6.626				
Personally Witnessed Someone being Seriously Wounded or Killed				0.842	1091	.400	.001
Selected	840	26.61	6.427				
Did not select	253	26.99	5.97				

Using the Cohen's-d point estimate, the mean difference between those who

reported personally witnessing someone from their unit or an ally unit being seriously

wounded or killed was .161 standard deviations higher on the ease of transition scale

than those who did not. This is a small effect on those who reported personally

witnessing someone from their unit or an ally unit being seriously wounded or killed,

having a harder time with their transition. Like other nominal variables in this study, the

effects of these questions on key combat engagements were also tested on each

outcome variable using the Eta-square test. The results of these tests, all of which were

less than 1%, are displayed in Tables 45 and 46 in column η^2. These results can be

interpreted as the effect the factor had on the corresponding outcome variable.

Because of their low associations, these variables were not included in the regression models.

While responding "yes" to any one of the four questions represented exposure to a key combat engagement, a combat exposure scale was created by summing responses to the four questions with a minimum score of zero and a maximum of four, with higher scores indicating a higher combat exposure (M=2.89, SD=1.541). Internal consistency and reliability were analyzed by calculating Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient. This scale displayed an acceptable to high level of internal consistency and inter-item reliability (α=.704) for those who completed the scale (n=1148).

A One-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the reported ease of transition with combat exposure. A violation of the homogeneity of variances assumption was identified by the Levene's statistic and a Welch test was used. Descriptive statistics and results for the ANOVA test are displayed in Tables 43 and 44 and show no significant differences between combat exposure and ease of transition [$F_{Welch}(4, 215.018) = 1.767$, p=.137].

Table 43

ANOVA Descriptive Statistics of Combat Exposure and Ease of Transition

	n	*M*	*SD*	Min	Max
0	210	8.24	3.498	3	15
1	49	8.43	2.739	3	15
2	85	8.46	3.119	3	15
3	162	8.72	2.966	3	15
4	675	8.89	3.073	3	15
Total	1181	8.70	3.134	3	15

Table 44

ANOVA (Welch) Results of Combat Exposure and Ease of Transition

	Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Welch	1.767	4	215.018	.137

A second One-way ANOVA was conducted to compare satisfaction with life with combat exposure. Descriptive statistics and results for the ANOVA test are displayed in Tables 40 and 41, and show no significant differences between combat exposure and satisfaction with life [$F(4, 1268) = .793$, $p=.529$].

Table 45

ANOVA Descriptive Statistics of Combat Exposure and the Satisfaction With Life Scale

	n	*M*	*SD*	Min	Max
0	208	27.01	6.278	5	35
1	53	26.77	6.399	7	35
2	94	27.67	5.612	9	35
3	186	26.33	6.335	6	35
4	732	26.72	6.343	5	35
Total	1273	26.78	6.281	5	35

Table 46

ANOVA Results of Combat Exposure and the Satisfaction With Life Scale

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	125.276	4	31.319	.793	.529
Within Groups	50052.607	1268	39.474		
Total	50177.882	1272			

Impact and Outcome of Combat Deployments. Participants were asked to

assess the impact or outcomes of their combat deployment or deployments on up to

seven items; their family situation, their chance for promotions and advancement within

the military, their physical health, their mental health, their relationship with their

family of origin, and for those who cited being married, their relationship with their

spouse, and for those who reported being parents while deployed, their relationship

with their children. Scores for each ranged from one through five, from extremely

negative to extremely positive. A scale of Impacts and Outcomes of Combat

Deployments was created by summing responses to questions with a minimum score of

five and a maximum of 35, with higher scores indicating combat deployments having a

positive impact or outcome (M=19.56, SD=4.14). This scale displayed an adequate to

high level of internal consistency (α=.73) when tested on those who completed the scale

(n=643).

A Pearson Correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between this

scale of impact and outcome of combat deployment and ease of transition and again

between this scale of impact and outcome of combat deployment and satisfaction with

life. A statistically significant, negative but weak relationship between the impact and

outcome of combat deployments scale and ease of transition was identified [r= -.308, n=

675, p< .001]. This means that higher scores in the scale of impact and outcome of

combat deployment correlate with lower scores in Ease of Transition, (lower scores

meaning an easier time in transition. This is displayed in Figure 4 as a scatterplot.

Figure 4

Correlation Scatter Plot between Impact and Outcome of Combat Deployments and Ease of Transition
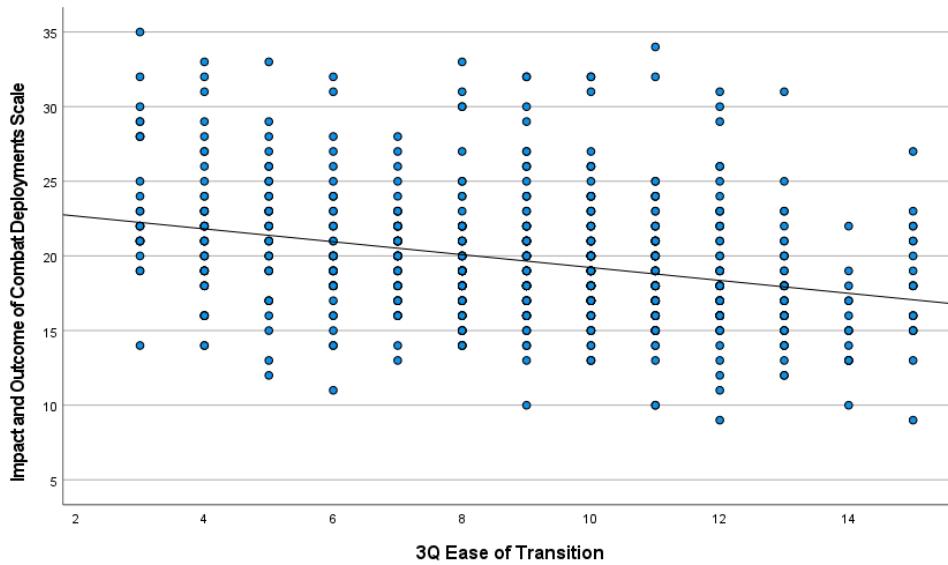
A second Pearson Correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between this scale of impact and outcome of combat deployment and the Satisfaction With Life Scale. As with Ease of Transition, a negative but weak statistically significant relationship between the impact and outcome of combat deployments scale and Satisfaction With Life Scale was identified [r= .250, n= 734, p< .001]. This means that higher scores on the scale of impact and outcome of combat deployment correlate with higher scores on the Satisfaction With Life Scale. These results are also displayed as a scatterplot in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Correlation Scatter Plot between Impact and Outcome of Combat Deployments and the

Satisfaction With Life Scale
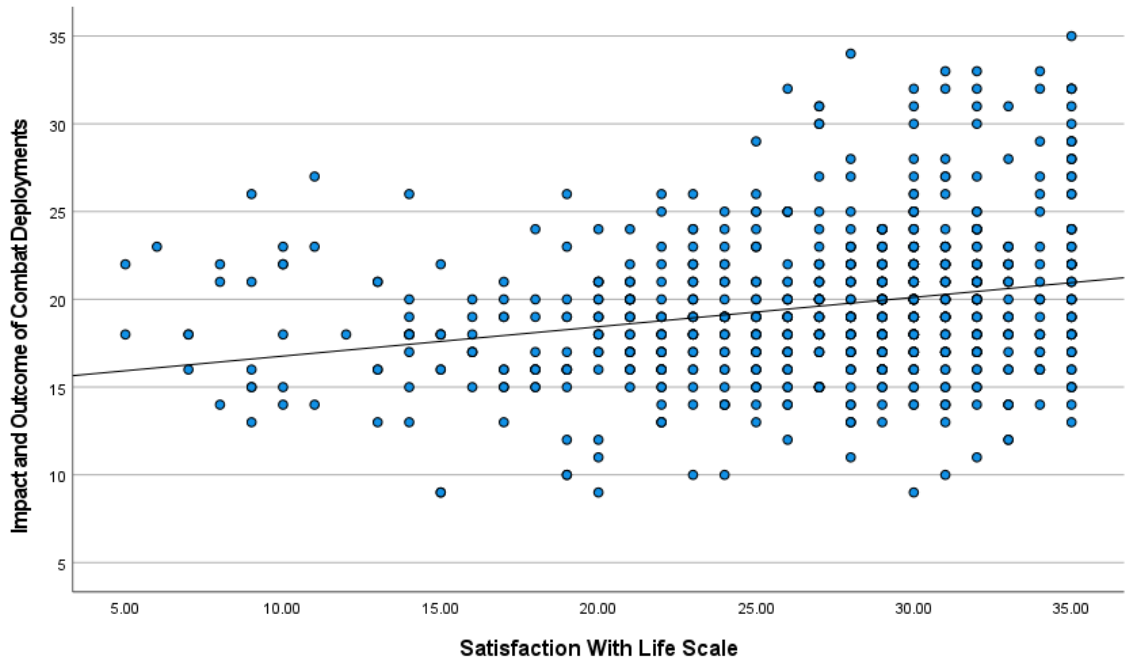
Transitional Preparedness

Transitional preparedness consists of two different sub-measures: time spent

seriously planning for transition and the use of transitional assistance programs.

Time Preparing for Discharge. Participants were first asked, "Approximately how

long before your discharge did you start to consider and seriously plan on your

transition and life outside the military? Scores ranged from 1 to 8 with higher scores

indicating more time used to prepare (*M*=3.23, *SD*=1.881). Response options included,

1= "*I made no plans for my transition or life after the military,*" 2= "*1-6 months prior to*

discharge," 3= "*6-12 months prior to discharge,*" 4= "*12-18 months prior to discharge,*"

5= "*18-24 months prior to discharge,*" 6= "*2-3 years prior to discharge,*" 7= "*3=4 years*

prior to discharge," 8= "*More than 4 years prior to discharge.*" A Pearson Correlation

was conducted to examine the relationship between time spent preparing for discharge

and ease of transition and again between time spent preparing for discharge and

satisfaction with life. A statistically significant but weak correlation was identified

between both outcome variables' time spent preparing for discharge and ease of

transition [r= -.149, n= 1168, p< .001] and the Satisfaction With Life Scale [r= .59, n=

1257, *p*= .038]. This means that as time spent preparing increases, scores in ease of

transition and satisfaction with life go down, indicating an easier transition and

satisfaction with life.

Use of Transitional Assistance Programs. Participants were then asked about

their use of any transitional assistance programs used. Five response options included 0)

"*I only sat through what was required or mandatory,*" 1) "*I took full advantage of the*

standard Army transition assistance programs like ACAP or SFL-TAP (Army Career Alumni

Program or Soldier for Life- Transiting Assistance Program)," 2) *I engaged in programs or*

resources hosted by my Special Forces group or SOF unit like…" (then given a text box),

3) "*I utilized external civilian program like… (Special Forces Charitable Trust, Elite Meet,*

The Honor Foundation, The Special Forces Foundation, etc.)" (then given a text box), and

4) "*Other*" (then given a text box). Scores ranged from 0 to 4 with higher scores

indicating the use of more transitional assistance programs used (*M*=.66, *SD*=.840).

A Pearson Correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between the

number of transitional assistance programs used and ease of transition and again

between the number of transitional assistance programs used and satisfaction with life.

No statistically significant correlation was identified in either outcome variables'

between the number of transitional assistance programs used and ease of transition [r=

.022, n= 1181, *p*= .458] or between the number of transitional assistance programs used

and satisfaction with life [r= -.023, n= 1273, *p*= .412].

Later, these two variables were consolidated by adding how long in advance the

participant began to actively prepare for their transition with the number of transitional

assistance programs they utilized to create a single variable with a score range between

1 (1= "*I made no plans for my transition*" and 0= "*I only sat through what was required*")

and 12 (8= more than four years of preparations for discharge and 4= participation in all

transitional assistance program options).

A Pearson Correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between time

spent preparing for discharge and the number of transitional assistance programs used

with ease of transition and again between time spent preparing for discharge and the

number of transitional assistance programs used and satisfaction with life. A weak but

statistically significant correlation was identified between the time spent preparing for

discharge and the number of transitional assistance programs used and ease of

transition [r= -.120, n= 1168, *p*< .001]. No statistically significant correlations were

identified between time spent preparing for discharge and the number of transitional

assistance programs used and satisfaction and satisfaction with life [r= .042, n= 1257, *p*=

.140].

While many predictor variables have been analyzed thus far, Table 47 provides a visual representation of the variables that will be included in the multiple regression analysis including many that will be common to both models.

Table 47

Variables Included in Multiple Regression Model

Ease of Transition	Satisfaction With Life Scale
Civilian education at discharge	Employment satisfaction
Single never married	---
Second marriage	---
Third marriage	---
Fourth or more marriage	---
Currently divorced	---
Factors important for transition	---
Emotional and social support	---
Seriously wounded	Number of combat deployments
Impacts of Deployments	---
Time planning for transition	---
Time planning for transition & The number of TAP used	Ease of transition

Multivariate Analysis

To address the research questions, are Special Forces veterans more likely to report an easier readjustment to civilian life based on their experiences and demographic characteristics, and are Special Forces veterans more likely to report differences in their scores on the satisfaction with life index based on their reported ease of readjustment to their civilian life, experiences, and demographic characteristics, two multiple regression models were created. Standard multiple regression analysis was used because of its ability to identify relationships between an outcome variable and

multiple predictor variables, which were identified as significantly correlated with the outcomes in bivariate analysis. The first model tested the relationship between the outcome variable Ease of transition, and 12 predictor variables; level of civilian education at discharge, current marital statuses (*single/never married, 2nd, 3rd, 4th or more marriage*, and *currently divorced*), factors selected as important to the transition and that provided emotional and practical support, if they were injured or wounded while performing their military job, Impacts and outcomes of deployments, the time spent preparing for discharge and the time spent preparing for discharge with the count of TAP used. While current marital status was found to be significant in both the ANOVA test with ease of transition and Satisfaction With Life Scale, as a categorical variable, it was recoded or dummy coded, so each category could be run in the regression models (Lunt, 2015). Given that participants who selected "1st marriage" accounted for the majority of the sample population, approximately 45%, it was selected to serve as the constant with the remaining categories being tested separately in the model.

An analysis of standard residuals reported the data contained no outliers (Std. Residual Min = -2.595, Std. Residual Max = 2.666), and the Durbin-Watson statistic concluded the assumption of independence of errors terms were met (Durbin-Watson value = 1.955). The Normal P-P plot of standardized residuals indicated a relatively normal distribution, see Figure 6.

Figure 6

Normal P-P plot of Standard Residuals in Regression Model Ease of Transition
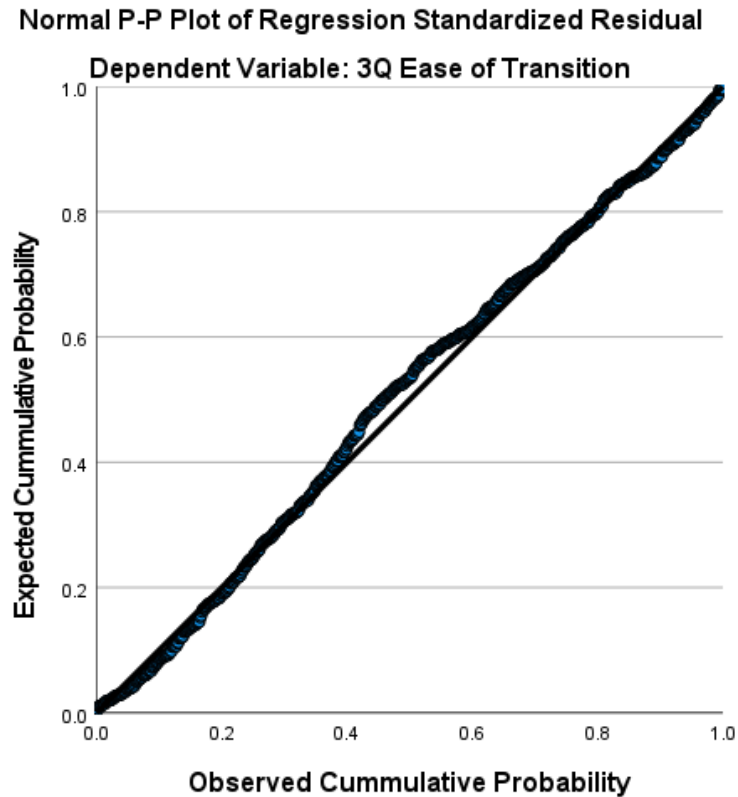
Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual
Dependent Variable: 3Q Ease of Transition

The scatter plot of standardized predicted values showed the data met the assumptions of homogeneity of variance and linearity. The results show that this multiple regression model was significant at $p < .001$ and accounted for .200 or 20% of the variance in Ease of Transition scores [$F(12,642) = 13.374$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .200$, R^2 $_{Adjusted} = .185$]. See Tables 48 and 49 for regression output.

Table 48

Multiple Regression Ease of Transition Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	Durbin-Watson
.447	.200	.185	2.676	.200	13.374	12	642	<.001	1.955

Table 49

Multiple Regression Ease of Transition ANOVA Output

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	1148.790	12	95.733	13.374	<.001***
Residual	4595.646	642	7.158		
Total	5744.437	654			

***p<.001.

Analysis of the coefficients output Table 50 shows that ease of transition scores were significantly predicted by the level of civilian education held by the veteran at discharge [β = -.153, $t(642)$ = -4.168, p <.001].

Table 50

Multiple Regression Ease of Transition Coefficients Output

Multiple Regression Ease of Transition Coefficients Output	Unstandardized Coefficients		Std. Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error				Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	15.656	0.672		23.290	.000***	14.336	16.976		
Civ edu at discharge	-0.204	0.049	-0.153	-4.168	.000***	-0.300	-0.108	0.924	1.082
Single never married	3.947	2.686	0.052	1.470	.142	-1.327	9.221	0.994	1.006
Second marriage	0.077	0.253	0.012	0.305	.761	-0.420	0.574	0.843	1.187
Third marriage	0.184	0.368	0.019	0.500	.617	-0.539	0.907	0.855	1.169
Fourth or more marriage	0.498	0.578	0.032	0.861	.390	-0.637	1.633	0.927	1.079
Currently divorced	0.066	0.359	0.007	0.183	.855	-0.639	0.770	0.879	1.138
Factors important for transition	-0.132	0.093	-0.055	-1.425	.155	-0.315	0.050	0.852	1.174
Emotional and social support	-0.219	0.040	-0.210	-5.449	.000***	-0.299	-0.140	0.835	1.197
Seriously wounded	-0.027	0.094	-0.010	-0.289	.773	-0.213	0.158	0.959	1.043
Impacts of Deployments	-0.185	0.026	-0.255	-7.027	.000***	-0.236	-0.133	0.943	1.061
Time planning for transition	-0.350	0.151	-0.213	-2.322	.021*	-0.646	-0.054	0.148	6.765
Time planning for transition and the number of TAP used	0.208	0.127	0.152	1.635	.103	-0.042	0.458	0.144	6.948

***p<.001. *p<.05

This means that a one year increase in civilian education is associated with a decrease in reported ease of transition (lower is better) of approximately .204 score points, holding all other variables in the model statistically constant.

Social support was identified as statistically significant in predicting the veterans reported ease of transition. Specifically, when asked to rate the degree of emotional and practical support they received from family, friends, military supervisors, and coworkers [β = -.210, t(642) = -5.449, p <.001]. This can also be interpreted as one unit increase in social support is equal to a reduction of approximately .219 score points on the ease of transition scale, holding all other variables in the model statistically constant.

Next, the impacts deployments had on the veteran and their family [β = -.255, t(642) = -7.027, p <.001]. This includes the overall impact the veteran felt their deployments had on their veteran's family situation, their chance for promotions and advancement within the military, their physical health, their mental health, and their relationship with their family of origin was also significant. This means that one unit increase in the scale of impacts of deployments (higher scores are equal to a perception of better outcomes from the deployments) was equal to an approximate reduction of .185 score points on the ease of transition scale holding all other variables in the model statistically constant.

Finally, the time the veteran spent actively preparing for the transition [β = -.213, t(642) = -2.322, p = .021]. More clearly stated, one unit increase in time spent preparing for the transition was equal to a reduction of .35 score points in the ease of transition scale.

This model found the remaining predictor variables as nonsignificant. These include the veteran's current marital status, factors important for transition such as family, military and civilian friendships, and their relationship with their spouse, being seriously wounded, and the combination of time planning for transition with the number of transition assistance programs used.

A second multiple regression model was created to address the question, are Special Forces veterans more likely to report differences in their scores on the satisfaction with life index based on their reported ease of readjustment to their civilian life, experiences, and demographic characteristics. This model tested scores on the Satisfaction With Life Scale the relationship with 12 predictor variables, employment satisfaction, five current marital statuses (*single/never married, 2nd, 3rd, 4th or more*, and *currently divorced*), factors selected as important to the transition and that provided emotional and practical support, number of deployments, impacts and outcomes of deployments, and the time spent preparing for discharge. The 12th predictor variable included in the model was the three-question ease of transition scale score used as the outcome variable in the previous regression model.

An analysis of standard residuals reported the data contained no outliers (Std. Residual Min = -2.375, Std. Residual Max = 5.093), and the Durbin-Watson test concluded assumptions of independence of errors terms were met (Durbin-Watson value = 2.058). The Normal P-P plot of standardized residuals indicates a relatively normal distribution, see Figure 7.

Figure 7

Normal P-P plot of Standard Residuals in Regression Model Satisfaction With Life Scale
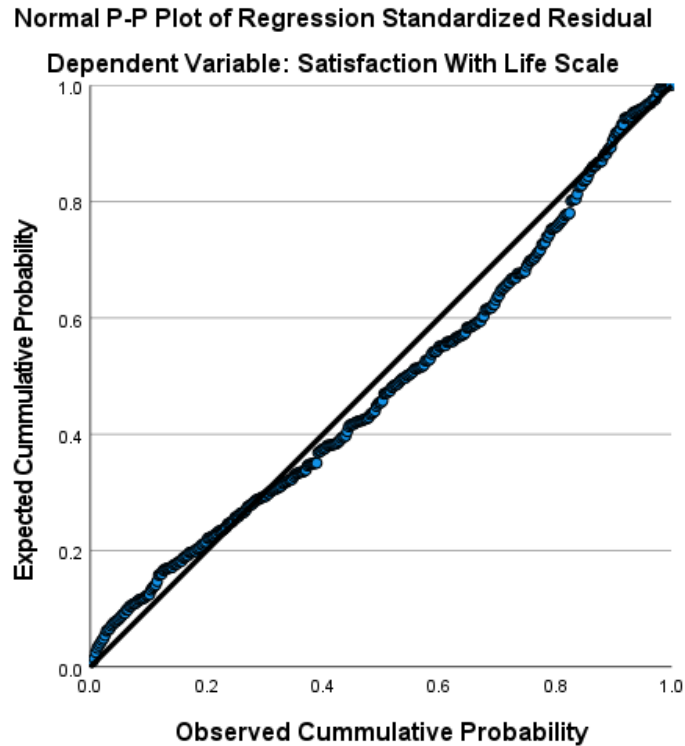
Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual
Dependent Variable: Satisfaction With Life Scale

The scatter plot of standardized predicted values showed the data met the assumptions of homogeneity of variance and linearity. The results show in Tables 51 and 52, that this multiple regression model was reliable at $p < .001$ and accounted for .262 or 26% of the variance in Satisfaction With Life Scale scores [$F(12,366) = 10.813$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .262$, $R^2_{Adjusted} = .238$].

Table 51

Multiple Regression Satisfaction With Life Scale Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	Durbin-Watson
.512	.262	.238	5.084	.262	10.813	12	366	<.001	2.058

Table 52

Multiple Regression Satisfaction With Life Scale ANOVA Output

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	3353.319	12	279.443	10.813	<.001***
Residual	9458.729	366	25.844		
Total	12812.047	378			

***$p<.001$.

Analysis of coefficients output, Table 53, indicates that Satisfaction With Life Scale scores were significantly predicted by seven of the 12 included variables.

Table 53

Multiple Regression Satisfaction With Life Scale Coefficients Output

Multiple Regression Satisfaction with Life Scale Coefficients Output	Unstandardized Coefficients		Std. Coefficients	t	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for B		Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	22.067	2.594		8.506	<.001***	16.966	27.169		
Employment satisfaction	0.208	0.071	0.133	2.946	.003**	0.069	0.347	0.989	1.011
Single never married	5.550	5.125	0.049	1.083	.279	-4.527	15.628	0.987	1.013
Second marriage	0.562	0.630	0.043	0.891	.373	-0.677	1.800	0.853	1.173
Third marriage	0.663	0.939	0.034	0.707	.480	-1.183	2.509	0.879	1.138
Fourth or more marriage	1.370	1.706	0.038	0.803	.423	-1.986	4.725	0.912	1.097
Currently divorced	-2.940	0.884	-0.159	-3.327	<.001***	-4.678	-1.202	0.886	1.129
Factors important for transition	0.582	0.229	0.124	2.543	.011*	0.132	1.032	0.855	1.170
Emotional and social support	0.323	0.105	0.155	3.074	.002**	0.116	0.529	0.791	1.264
Number of combat deployments	-0.211	0.079	-0.123	-2.682	.008**	-0.366	-0.056	0.954	1.049
Impacts of Deployments	0.176	0.070	0.121	2.525	.012*	0.039	0.313	0.880	1.136
Time planning for transition	-0.065	0.161	-0.019	-0.404	.687	-0.382	0.252	0.891	1.123
Ease of transition	-0.538	0.099	-0.268	-5.421	<.001***	-0.734	-0.343	0.828	1.208

***$p<.001$. **$p<.01$, *$p<.05$

The analysis shows that employment satisfaction significantly predicted values in satisfaction with life [β = .133, $t(378)$ = -2.946, p = .001]. In other words, one unit increase in Employment Satisfaction (Higher is better) is associated with a increase of about .208 score points on the Satisfaction with Life Scale holding all other variables in the model statistically constant.

While those who selected their current marital status as "*1st marriage*" served as the constant, those who identified as currently divorced were found to have a statistically significant difference in Satisfaction With Life Scale scores when compared to the constant or those who identified as in their first marriage [β = -.159, $t(378)$ = -3.327, p = <.001]. More plainly, this means that those who identify as currently divorced score approximately -2.94 Satisfaction With Life Scale score points lower than those who identify as 1st marriage holding all other variables in the model statistically constant.

Factors important in transition i.e., family, both military and civilian friendships, and relationship with spouse [β = .124, $t(378)$ = 2.543, p = .011]. Spoken more plainly, One unit increase in social support factors selected as important in transition was equal to an increase in Satisfaction With Life Scale scores by approximately .582 score points holding all other variables in the model statistically constant.

Social support was again identified as statistically significant in satisfaction with life when considering emotional and practical support the veteran received from family, friends, military supervisors, and coworkers [β = .105, $t(378)$ = 3.074, p = .002]. This means that one unit increase in social support is equal to an increase of approximately

.323 Satisfaction with Life Scale score points, holding all other variables in the model statistically constant.

The number of combat deployments a Special Forces veteran participated in was statistically significant [β = -.123, $t(378)$ = -2.682, p = .008]. In other words, each additional deployment is equal to a reduction of approximately .211 score points on the Satisfaction with Life Scale holding all other variables in the model statistically constant.

In addition to the number of combat deployments, the overall impact the veteran felt their deployments had on their veteran's family situation, their chance for promotions and advancement within the military, their physical health, their mental health, and their relationship with their family of origin was also significant [β = .121, $t(378)$ = 2.525, p = .012]. One unit increase in the scale of impacts of deployments was equal to an approximate increase of .176 score points of the Satisfaction With Life Scale holding all other variables in the model statistically constant.

The last statistically significant predictor variable was their score on the three-question ease of transition scale [β = -.268, $t(378)$ = -5.421, p < .001] meaning that one unit decrease in the ease of transition scale lower is better was associated with an increase of .538 scores points on the Satisfaction With Life Scale.

Current marital status, single never married, second, third, fourth or more, and time spent actively planning for their transition variables were found nonsignificant in the satisfaction with life regression model.

The purpose of this study was to provide a foundation of demographic and experiential characteristics of the Special Forces veteran that are associated with

reported ease of transition out of the military, as well as current satisfaction with life.

This chapter provided a description and summation of the analysis used to address the

research questions of this study and its results. Though participation in each question

varied, a total of 1363 met the eligibility criteria for this study. The diversity of the

sample population offered a rarely seen glimpse into the unique population of Special

Forces veterans.

Chapter Five- Discussion

This chapter discusses the results and implications of the analysis described in

Chapter Four. First, the interpretation of results regarding their support or contradiction

of previous literature is discussed. Next, the theoretical and research implications of the

study are discussed followed by the study's limitations and suggestions for future social

science research.

Interpretation of Results

This study was guided by two research questions. The first aimed to determine

the contribution of life experiences and demographic characteristics, such as levels of

civilian education, employment, relationships and social support (marital or parental

status), deployment histories, and transitional preparedness, had in predicting reported

ease of readjustment to civilian life. The second was to explore differences in participant

satisfaction with life, related to their reported ease of transition, life experiences, and

relevant demographic characteristics.

Ease of Transition

A scale comprising three questions was used to measure ease of transition.

Scores ranged from 3 to 15, with lower scores indicating an easier time and higher

scores representing a hard time in transition (M = 8.70, SD = 3.134); the scale had an

acceptable reliability coefficient alpha of .77.

Four predictor variables, time spent planning for the transition, emotional and

social support, level of civilian education at discharge, and impacts of deployments were

identified in the regression model as having the highest predicted values in reducing

scores on the ease of transition scale (lower is better)

The amount of time the participant spent seriously planning for their transition

was found to be significant. Specifically, one unit increase in time spent seriously

planning for and considering transition was associated with a reduction of .35 (β = -.350)

score points in ease of transition, holding all other variables in the model statistically

constant. While the number of transitional assistance programs used had no statistically

significant correlations with ease of transition for this unique sample population, time

spent seriously planning for and considering the transition did. Of these four, time spent

seriously planning for transition held the highest predicted value with ease of transition.

Aligning with the theory of Bounded Rationality, the theory postulates that, when faced

with decisions, restrictions of time will be a key limitation in making the best decisions.

In fact, if the act of seriously planning for discharge was initiated earlier, adding more

time, then it could be argued that the individual could better address limitations to

accurate or available information, another key limitation of informed decision-making

discussed in the theory. Greater time for planning would allow the transitioning service

member to better consider unplanned vulnerabilities, and/or alternative and

contingency courses of action to their transitional plan.

The level of civilian education at discharge held the second largest predicted

value with ease of transition with a beta of -.204. This means that an increase in one

year of civilian education at discharge was associated with a decrease of about .204

score points in ease of transition (lower is better) holding all other variables in the model statistically constant.

These findings are consistent with Morin (2011) who found that being a college graduate accounted for 5% of reported ease of transition and are congruent with the goal orientation of Herbert Simon's theory of Bounded Rationality. While acknowledging the countless limitations to information, individuals whose decisions are based on what will help them yield the highest level of benefit across their objectives report the easiest transition, and this includes education. Civilian education has long been associated with future employment and higher income (Beckles et al., 2011). Awareness of this may be associated with why participants with higher levels of civilian education at discharge reported an easier transition. Interestingly, while the data reveal that many participants indicated higher levels of current education than at discharge, their current level of civilian education had no statistically significant predictive value with satisfaction with life. Although this may result from many influencing variables, one explanation could be the cognitive bias of the misinformation effect in that memories are overly influenced by events that happen after an actual event (Niosi, 2021). Depending on the recency of when participants attained their current level of civilian education, it may not feel as influential to their satisfaction with life as their level of education did at their time of discharge. Civilian education may have been significantly influential when they left the Army and likely re-entered the civilian workforce. Conversely, someone who has worked in a civilian workforce position for many years, may not as easily recognize the influence their level of civilian education had when compared to more recent employment

experiences and/or promotions that have since continued to influence their civilian

career.

Emotional and social support and impacts of deployments were also found to be

significant in the satisfaction with life regression model and are discussed below.

Satisfaction With Life

Satisfaction with life was scored through the use of the five-item Satisfaction

With Life Scale. Scores ranged from 5 to 35, with higher scores indicating a higher

satisfaction with life. In this study, the Satisfaction With Life Scale displayed a high level

of internal consistency (α=.89) returning a mean score of 26.78 (*SD*=6.281).

Among the predictor variables used in the regression model, those who

identified as currently divorced had a predicted satisfaction with life score of almost 3 (β

= -2.94) score points lower than those who identified as currently in their first marriage.

Ease of transition and factors important for transition had the next highest

association with Satisfaction With Life Scale scores. Ease of transition was found to have

a predictive value of β = -.538 or more plainly stated, one unit increase in ease of

transition (lower is better) is associated with an increase of more than half (.538) of a

score point on the Satisfaction With Life Scale, or that an easier transition was

associated with more satisfaction in life. It is unsurprising that, of the variables in the

regression model, ease of transition would be associated with satisfaction with life.

Though it may not be as prominent or psychologically impactful as other military

experiences, veterans' military transition was the most recent military experience and

therefore may be subject to recall bias or the availability heuristic. This last but critical

experience was their bridge to their next chapter in life and may have felt like a crucial component of later post-military experiences.

Coincidentally, the four factors most important to transition had a positive predictive value (β = .582). In other words, a one-point increase in factors important to transition is associated with an increase of more than half of a score point (.58) on the Satisfaction With Life Scale holding all other variables in the model statistically constant. This means that as factors important to transition climb, satisfaction with life scores also increase. Factors most important to transition included military and civilian friendships, family, and relationship with spouse. While these four factors were found not to correlate with ease of transition or scores on the Satisfaction With Life Scale individually, when merged into a scale, these variables became statistically significant. These factors may also be viewed as a form of ongoing or continued social support and may still be an important resource in the participant's life today. Because of this, these factors may also be subject to recall bias or the availability heuristic as they continue to provide value to the participant.

Two other social support variables were significant in both the ease of transition and the satisfaction with life regression models. The first was emotional and social support received from family, friends, military supervisors, and coworkers. One unit increase in emotional and social support was equal to a decrease of .219 score points in ease of transition and an increase of .323 score points in the Satisfaction With Life Scale. These results build on the finding of Russell and colleagues (2016) who found in their

sample of Special Forces soldiers that these same informal social support variables were also helpful in reducing post-deployment stressors (2016).

In the second, "impacts of deployment," where participants were asked to rate the impact of their deployments on their family situation, their chance for promotions and advancement within the military, their physical health, their mental health, their relationship with their family of origin, and for those who were married, their relationship with their spouse and for those who reported being parents while deployed, their relationship with their children, were found to be statistically significant in both regression models, ease of transition (β = -.185) and satisfaction with life (β = .176).

Interestingly, as the impacts of deployments were significant, the number of combat deployments was only significant in the satisfaction with life regression model having a Beta of -.211). This means that an additional deployment was associated with a reduction of approximately one-fifth (21.1%) of a score point on the Satisfaction With Life Scale holding all other variables in the model statistically constant or as the number of deployments increases, satisfaction in life decreases.

Surprisingly, increasing the number of transitional assistance programs used by a transitioning Special Forces veteran had no statistically significant effect on their reported ease of transition or satisfaction with life. While this study did not replicate Coons 2018 study, its use of similar measures contradicts Coons' findings, which found that increased discharge training was significantly and positively correlated with a reported easier transition and increased satisfaction with life (2018). Holding all other

variables constant, these results are inconsistent with Herbert Simon's theory of

Bounded Rationality, which addresses limitations to information. The results of this

study suggest that when offered access to additional information (more transitional

assistance programs), the results did not indicate this was associated with an increase in

reported ease of transition. These results should be interpreted with caution as the

sample included Special Forces Veterans who served over a wide range of time, some of

whom served as long ago as the Korean war. Since then, the concept of transitional

assistance and the programs developed to support it have evolved. Because of the

variability within the sample and the limitation to the Special Forces career field, the

results on participation in transitional assistance programs may not be generalizable to

conventional Army or other military veterans.

Coons (2018) also reported no correlation between combat exposure and ease

of transition or satisfaction with life. Although this study found a statistically significant

difference in ease of transition mean scores between those who had and had not been

deployed to a combat or war zone, because of its relatively small effect size, this

variable was not included in the regression model.

Implications

The findings of this study have significant implications for social scientists

working with Special Forces veterans, military veterans, and with those exposed to

combat and/or trauma. A significant level of demographic data was collected on

participants of this exploratory study, addressing an existing gap in the literature, as well

as creating a demographic profile of Special Forces veterans. The study provides a

beginning base of knowledge regarding demographic and experiential variables associated with a positive military-to-civilian transition for Special Forces veterans and can serve as informative for existing and future transition assistance programs.

Limitations

Sample

Differing from much of the existing military-to-civilian transition research, this study focused on a single, unique subsection of military occupations within the U.S. Army. Unfortunately, as with all studies, this too has several limitations. While participation was available to all U.S. Army veterans who completed the Special Forces Qualification Course, the use of a non-probability convenience sampling design limits the study's generalizability to the Special Forces veteran population. While this study included an extraordinary sample size of well over 1000 participants, it may not be representative of the Special Forces population.

Potential Bias

This sample, although large, was self-selecting and, as with any non-probability sampling strategy, the risk of selection bias should be acknowledged. Although participation was available to all Special Forces veterans, exposure to the survey was limited to those who had access to the internet. While the "digital divide," having access to the Internet, may not be a limitation (Pew Research Center, 2021), some Special Forces veterans may not have held the level of computer literacy to participate (Tingling, Parent, & Wade, 2003). Other Special Forces veterans may not have been exposed because of their little or lack of a social media presence, or because they were

not a member of the Special Forces Association at the time of the survey distribution,

would not have been exposed to the survey link.

The self-report nature of data collection must also be acknowledged as it may

have introduced a level of variance in response bias. As other researchers have stated

(Cooper et al., 2019), Special Forces soldiers are less likely to report mental and physical

health problems. For some service members, this may be due to the negative stigma

and fear associated with pursuing mental health treatment resulting in removal from

duty, or an overall cultural norm. Cooper and colleagues (2019) suggest Special Forces

soldiers exhibit similar reporting patterns. Though a pattern of under-reporting may be

true for those currently or recently transitioning, the civilian culture they are entering is

vastly different. As a benefit of military service, most service members are eligible for

V.A. healthcare. In addition to healthcare, some veterans are also eligible for disability

compensation, or service-connected disability, based on the degree of injury or

disabilities they may have received while serving in the military. As reported by

Mossman (1994), there is the potential for secondary gain for those who over-report,

essentially rewarding veterans for continued disability, and unfortunately, reducing

their interest in treatment.

Methodological

Another limitation is the study's cross-sectional design. There are likely

differences between those who served pre-9/11 and post-9/11 or between Vietnam-era

veterans and veterans of the war on terror. There may also be differences between

those who served as commissioned officers and those who did not. Of note, 56%

(m=246) of the participants in this study who served as commissioned officers (n=438) also served as enlisted service members in some capacity. There may also be differences between the length of time deployed rather than the number of deployments. In an effort to alleviate survey fatigue and reduce attrition, the survey length, of approximately 60 items, depending on the individual, was monitored closely and ancillary items were removed when possible. While the number of deployments was asked of survey participants, the length of these deployments was not clarified and differences remain unidentified in this study. Additionally, the units assigned to or occupation performed while deployed were not clarified leaving a vulnerability for participants to have been negatively impacted by deployment experiences that had no association with their service as a Special Forces soldiers. Next, the military-to-civilian transition and what is considered a "successful transition" remain vague concepts. Because of this, assessing a veteran's ease of transition is also difficult, especially considering the assumed differences between those who transitioned recently compared to those who may have transitioned many years ago. It was not possible to address cognitive biases, such as recall or the misinformation effect. Finally, as the statistical analysis was correlational and causal inferences were not made. Last, the use of multiple *t*-tests in the bivariate analysis may have introduced or increased the risk of type-1 errors when attempting to identify the appropriate variables to include in the multiple regression analysis models.

Future Research

Future research should continue to look at the relationship between transition assistance programs and their impact on service members' transition out of the military. While these programs may provide an immeasurable value to transitioning service members, this study found no correlation between the number of transitional assistance programs used and reported ease of transition or scores on the Satisfaction With Life Scale within this unique sample. This study did not address the level of engagement sample participants had, nor did it address their personal level of preparation, which may have greatly influenced their engagement in TAP. It is possible, however, that the data collected with respondents from such a wide range of years in Special Forces may have unintentionally diluted or disguised the value of current Army transition assistance programs, which have been specifically designed to help with the transition to civilian life. A small subset of the data might reveal this or other issues, such as the impacts of deployments and exposure to combat.

Additionally, future research may continue to explore the impacts of combat deployments. No statistically significant differences were found between those who had and had not deployed to a combat or war zone compared to ease of transition and scores on the Satisfaction With Life Scale; nor were differences in those who had deployed and were exposed to a key combat engagement found. These results are not consistent with previous research on exposure to combat trauma, and further research on pre-deployment training and resiliency may be warranted.

Last, the time between participation in this study and the participant's date of discharge from the military was not an included variable in any of the analyses. Future research may wish to consider the impact this plays on reported ease of transition and satisfaction with life.

Summary

As research on the military-to-civilian transition remains limited, this study provided a window into a relatively inaccessible subpopulation of the veteran population, exploring their experience of transitioning out of the Army. Special Forces veterans are a small but highly unique portion of the veteran population, yet our knowledge of their experience in transitioning out of the military or after their military career is almost non-existent. Let this study serve as a foundation for adding to the knowledge we further obtain about this exclusive population after their military service.

Appendices

Appendix A

Definition of Terms

Enablers- sometimes referred to as *sustainment* or *support personnel*, these service

members are assigned to SOF units to work in important *non-operational*

support positions. While they are sometimes assigned to work in direct support

roles or alongside operational missions, these service members are considered

non-qualified SOF personnel.

Green Beret- A U.S. Army uniform accouterment authorized by then President John F.

Kennedy for wear by a soldier or officer who has completed the Special Forces

Qualification Course (SFQC).

Home of record- traditionally this is the location in which a service member joined the

military

Military Occupational Speciality (MOS)- An MOS or Military Occupation Specialty serves

as an administrative code used to identify a service member's official military

occupation (referred to as "rat" in"the"US Navy). The U.S. Army uses two

numbers to represent a branch and a letter to represent their specialty within

that branch, i.e., 11A, 11-series meaning infantry, A meaning officers (A is

consistent with the officers for all branches). An 11B would represent a

traditional infantry soldier versus an 11C which represents an "ind"rec" fire"

in"ant"y soldier who specializes in heavy weapons like mortar systems. Qualified

Special Forces soldiers hold an 18-series MOS with their specialty indicated by

one of five letters. While a soldier may have been trained in multiple MOS, they only hold one as their current or assigned MOS.

Service Member (SM)- A generic term used to describe a military member regardless of branch instead of soldier for the Army, sailor for the Navy, Airman for the Air Force, and marine for the Marines.

Special Forces (SF)- The U.S. military's premier unconventional warriors, the Special Forces (Green Berets) provide a viable military option for operational requirements that may be inappropriate or not appropriate for large conventional forces (USASOC Factbook, 2018). Special Forces are divided into five active duty and two National Guard regionally affiliated groups. Qualified Special Forces soldiers, sometimes referred to as "Green Berets" are assigned to operational detachments within the groups. These detachments can operate independently to conduct special operations missions often in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments, and include one or more of the following elements: low visibility, clandestine in nature, time-sensitive, conducted with and or through local or indigenous forces, requiring regional and language expertise, and or are conducted in a high-risk environment (Feickert, 2021).

Special Forces Assessment and Selection (SFAS)- a 3-week course open to all interested service members regardless of assigned MOS established to assess a candidate's suitability for Special Forces training (Zazanis, 1997).

Special Forces Qualification Course (SFQC)- Originally a year and a half long (Green Berets, 2016), the current 53-week Special Forces Qualification Couse provides

an extreme overview of basic special operations techniques, small unit tactics,

and survival training designed to prepare the candidate for the Special Forces

mission (www.goarmy.com., n.d.-a.). In addition to the SFQC, a language

requirement must also be met before a candidate can graduate, which can

greatly impact the length of time the soldier spends in the SFQC

(www.goarmy.com., n.d.-a).

Special Operations Forces (SOF)- A blanket term for special operations units immaterial

of military branch.

SOF personnel- describes the *operational* and *non-operational* (enablers) personnel

assigned to a SOF unit.

Transition (military-civilian transition)- is an ambiguous term that fails to operationalize

any specific problem (Zogas, 2017).

Transition Assistance Program (TAP)- The traditional Transition Assistance Program or

"TAP" is the Department of Defense program designed to help service members

on active duty prepare for the transition; to develop a plan to identify and

address discharge questions systematically. Originally developed in 1991 as the

Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP), the program was a response to the

systematic downsizing of the military in the 1980s (Bascetta, 2002; Kamarck,

2018). ACAP lasted from 1991 through 2011 when it was restructured by the

President Obama administration, the Veterans Employment Initiative Task Force,

the Department of Defense, and the Department of Veterans Affairs (Kamarck,

2018). Through counseling and employment assistance, the Army's current

Transitional Assistance Program is designed to help most Soldiers identify skills

and resources to facilitate informed career decisions and ensure competitiveness

and success in the civilian workforce (Transiting Assistance Program, n.d.).

Though other areas are covered, helping service members secure post-military

employment, education, and benefits continues as the central goal of the

program (Whitworth et al., 2020). This is because the majority of enlisted service

members join the military shortly after completing high school, complete a single

three or four-year military contract, choose not to reenlist, and are discharged

(Office of the Under Secretary for Personnel and Readiness, 2017). Depending on

their type of discharge, they will re-enter the civilian world in the prime working

years of their lives (McKay, B., & McKay, K., 2019).

Successful transition- a successful transition out of the military and into the civilian

world is an objective measure based on a veteran's self-report of the process.

Appendix B

Cover Letter and Informed Consent

U.S. Army Special Forces veterans, thank you for your time and willingness to complete this anonymous survey. The purpose of this survey is to explore the experience of Special Forces veterans transitioning out of the Army and in returning to civilian life. While there may be no direct individual benefits in taking part in this survey, your participation will help strengthen the voice of this highly underrepresented and unique population and clarify their experience in returning to civilian life. This survey is estimated to take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

There are no known risks or disadvantages to participating in this survey. You should not participate if you do not wish to provide information regarding your experiences in transitioning out of the Army and back into civilian life. Should participation in this survey be emotionally distressing, please consider contacting the Veterans crisis line at 1-800-273-8255. If you do not want to be in this study, there are no other choices except not to take part. Participants may skip questions they do not wish to answer. Total participation is estimated to exceed 500 Special Forces veterans. This project has no affiliation with the Department of Veterans Affairs or the Department of Defense. Data collected in this survey will be used to fulfill requirements for an academic degree program.

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You will not lose any services, benefits, or rights you would normally have if you chose not to volunteer. If you are currently enrolled as a student at the University of Kentucky, your grades will not be affected by your decision to take part or not. Your instructors will not know who has participated.

This survey is anonymous, so please do not put your name or other identifying information anywhere on the survey. Participant names, IP addresses, email addresses, or any other identifying information will not be collected within the survey. We will not know which responses are yours if you choose to participate.

Survey data is stored on a Qualtrics secure server. Qualtrics software meets U.S. government security compliances and is FedRamp authorized. All data transmitted on Qualtrics is done through HTTPS protocols and Transport Layer Security (TLS) encryption.

Questions about this project should be directed to the principal investigator and student researcher, Edward Richter of the University of Kentucky, College of Social Work at edwardjrichter@uky.edu or faculty advisor Dr. Christopher Flaherty, at

chris.flaherty@uky.edu. Questions about your rights as a research volunteer may be directed to the University of Kentucky Office of Research Integrity at 1-866-400-9428.

- I consent.
- I do NOT consent. (Skip logic to the end of the survey)

Appendix C

Survey Announcements

The below survey announcements were approved by the University of Kentucky Institutional Review Board on April 1, 2022. These include a suggested narrative for a social media post and an email distributed by a Special Forces-centric organization.

Social Media Post:

Special Forces veterans of all eras, how was your experience in transition out of the Army and integrating into your civilian world? Please consider sharing your experience by completing this anonymous online survey. This voluntary survey is part of a research project being conducted at the University of Kentucky to better understand the transitional experience and needs of Special Forces veterans from all generations. This survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Questions about this research project should be directed to the principal investigator and student researcher, Edward Richter of the University of Kentucky at edwardjrichter@uky.edu.

Email Distributed by Special Forces Centric Organizations:

(Introduction by the organization)
Special Forces veterans of all eras, how was your experience in transition out of the Army and integrating into your civilian life? While we know we are a unique population, the military-to-civilian transitional experience is yet to be explored when focusing specifically on Special Forces veterans. Please consider sharing your story to help clarify the transitional experience and needs of Special Forces veterans from all generations.

This survey is part of a research project being conducted by Edward Richter, a Special Forces veteran and graduate student at the University of Kentucky. Participation is voluntary and anonymous. This survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Thank you all for your service and for helping to tell the story of the SF soldier.

Questions about this research project can be sent directly to me, the principal investigator and student researcher at edwardjrichter@uky.edu.

Edward Richter
University of Kentucky

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