

Evaluating the quality of civilian transitions in post-9/11 veterans

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Researchers at Penn State's Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness (Clearinghouse) have developed a new framework for assessing the quality of military-to-civilian transitions (MTCTs) among post-9/11

veterans.

The Clearinghouse team has published the details of the new framework, which centers on well-being domains such as health, employment and social transitions to determine a wholistic picture of transition quality, in [*Armed Forces & Society*](#).

"Currently, there is no accepted framework for evaluating how well post-9/11 veterans are making the adjustment from military to [civilian life](#)," said Jennifer Karre, assistant research professor at the Clearinghouse and corresponding author on the paper. "As a result, there is no consistent reliable way to understand whether or not these veterans are doing great, just okay, or poorly."

The researchers analyzed [survey data](#) collected from more than 3,000 post-9/11 veterans. Participants completed the survey every six months over six years since they left the military.

"Four principles guided the creation of our new framework," said co-author Daniel Perkins, director and principal scientist at the Clearinghouse and professor of family and youth resiliency and policy in the College of Agricultural Sciences.

"Successful transition must be achievable for every veteran, evaluations of transition quality must be judgment free, objective assessment of transition quality are prioritized, and veterans' subjective assessments offer rich insights into transition quality."

The team identified seven life domains as critical to successful MTCTs: employment, education, financial, legal, social, mental health and physical health. The researchers assessed each domain using both objective data, such as whether the veteran was employed or not, and subjective data, such as whether the veteran reported being very satisfied

with work.

For example, in the employment domain, veterans were either employed or looking for employment, and veterans who were currently working were asked to rate their [satisfaction](#) with the type of work they did, opportunities for advancement and compensation.

In the financial domain, veterans indicated whether they could meet their immediate financial needs, such as paying rent and buying sufficient food, and future financial needs, such as saving for retirement or a child's education.

"For each life domain and subdomain, we established specific criteria to determine if a veteran's transition was successful, at-risk or problematic," Karre said.

"For example, in the social domain, veterans were asked how often someone would be available to have a good time with, provide suggestions to help with a personal problem, understand the veteran's personal problems, and to love and make you feel wanted. They were also asked about their satisfaction with [social support](#)."

Veterans were considered to have a problematic social transition if they indicated that someone was not available or was rarely available. If veterans indicated that someone was available some of the time on at least one item, they were considered to have an at-risk social transition, while those who reported having someone available most or all the time on all the items was designated as successful.

Successful social satisfaction was designated when veterans reported being somewhat or very satisfied with where they lived, their sense of belonging in the community and relationships with friends. At-risk social satisfaction was designated when veterans scored neither satisfied nor

dissatisfied on at least one of the three social satisfaction dimensions. Problematic social satisfaction occurred when veterans reported being dissatisfied on all three satisfaction items.

Similar designations were made across each life domain and subdomain. Each veteran's transition success was then examined three months and 36 months after leaving the military.

Two life domains were of concern, the researchers said. Three months after leaving the military, only 21% of veterans were classified as having a successful physical health transition.

At 36 months, the proportion declined to 17%. At three months 51% had a problematic physical health transition, which increased to 54% at 36 months. At both three and 36 months, 28% were considered at-risk.

Similarly, only 31% had a successful mental health transition at three months, and this decreased to 28% at 36 months. Those designated at-risk rose from 28% to 37%, although the proportion having a problematic transition declined from 41% to 34%.

In the education domain, 79% of veterans had a successful educational transition, although this declined to 69% at 36 months. The proportion of veterans in the at-risk and problematic designation evidenced small increases at 36 months.

Veterans had more successful financial and social transitions. In the financial domain, 40% of [veterans](#) were designated successful at three months, and this increased to 48% at 36 months. Those having problematic transitions decreased from 23% to 12%, while those at-risk slightly rose from 37% to 40%.

"Going forward, we will use the new framework to better understand the

factors, including demographic and experiential, that predict successful transitions and develop tailored transition interventions," Karre said.

More information: Jennifer K. Karre et al, What Do Successful Military-to-Civilian Transitions Look Like? A Revised Framework and a New Conceptual Model for Assessing Veteran Well-Being, *Armed Forces & Society* (2024). [DOI: 10.1177/0095327X231216678](https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X231216678)

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