



Louisiana Armed Forces Foundation Veterans Transition Needs Study

April 2014

Topline Outline v1

Objectives

The overarching objective of this study is to give voice to servicemen and veterans about their problems and needs associated with returning to civilian life after overseas deployment or separation.

- Identify and evaluate frequency and importance of problems faced when returning to civilian life
- Measure awareness, image, and usage of currently available support services and the agencies and organizations providing them
- Identify problems and issues currently being unmet and determine whether there are preferred channels to best offer and supply support services
- Identify programs, organizations, and agencies that are perceived as helpful or as doing a good job providing support services
- Determine the impact of fragmentation of services and provision of benefits and programs
- Describe similarities and differences across branches and duty statuses

Methodology

The Olinger Group collaborated with the Louisiana Armed Forces Foundation (LAFF) to create a custom online survey. Respondents were screened to only include respondents with military service who are not currently serving active duty.

The online survey took approximately 25 minutes to complete and gathered 268 completions. Four interviews were completed with Veterans' spouses. Due to the small number for this segment, the four cases were removed from the data resulting in an effective sample size of 264.

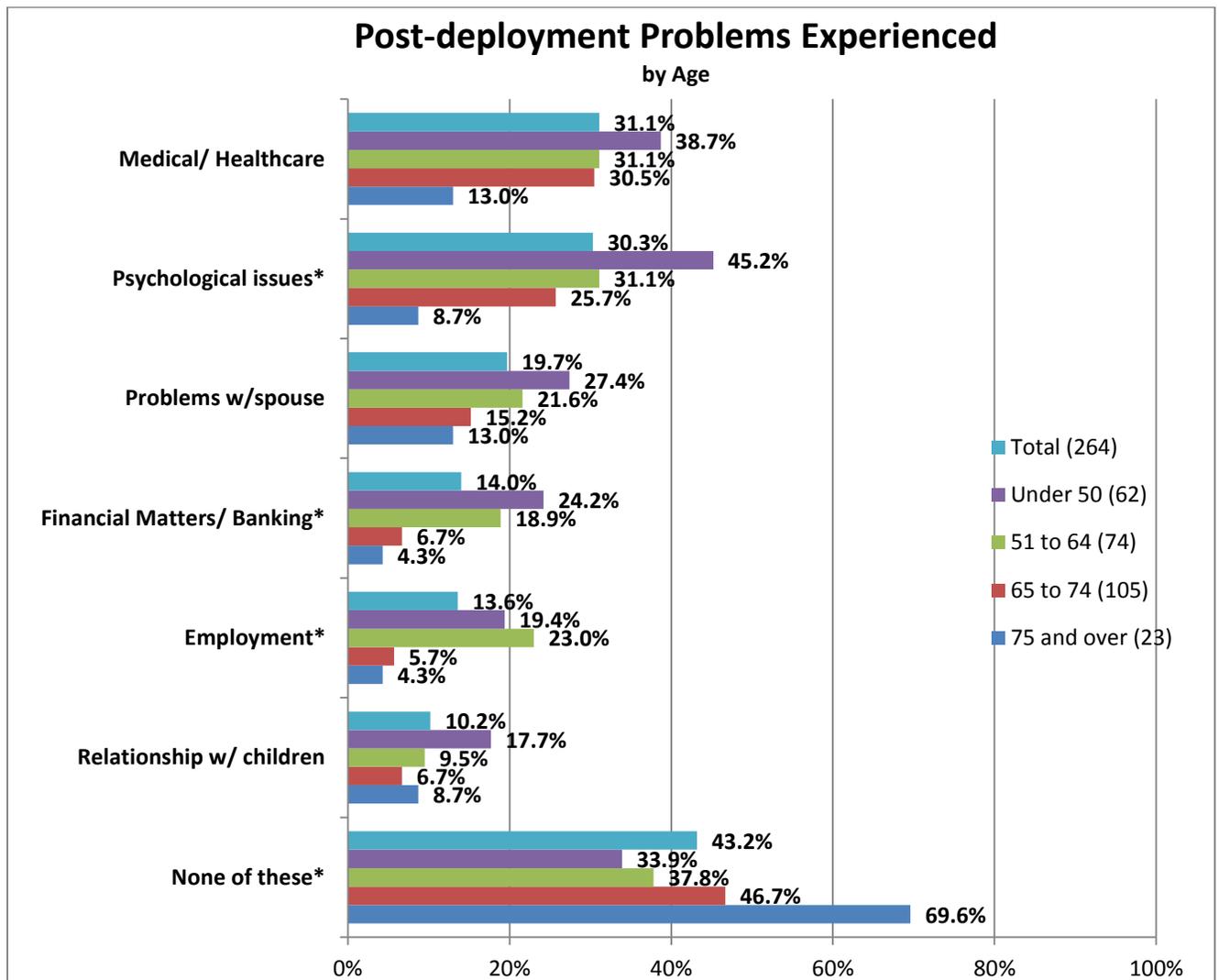
All charts, graphs, and tables are representative of the total number of respondents (n=264) unless otherwise stated. Caution should be used when interpreting results based on small sample sizes.

Executive Summary

- Overall, three consistent findings were noted:
 - First, lack of awareness of existing programs and resources was clearly the rule rather than the exception.
 - Awareness rates of less than 20% and in many cases less than 10% were not uncommon, and awareness rates of 50% or more were relatively rare.
 - A specific objective of the study was to assess the impact of fragmentation, and lack of awareness appears to be a likely impact of this circumstance.
 - Second, satisfaction with programs and resources among those who have used them is moderately high in most all instances, while perceptions of ease of access/use of programs and resources were not as positive.
 - When asked to name preferred sources of information and help, Veterans most frequently named family (including spouses), friends, and other Veterans, rather than existing governmental and non-governmental institutions.
 - This is not necessarily a negative, but this, combined with non-spectacular satisfaction and ease of use ratings, suggests that there is substantial room for improvement in the performance of Veterans-oriented help resources, as well as in making them easier to access and use.
 - Third, both the incidence of specific problems reported and the incidence of efforts to receive help were consistently higher among younger Veterans, often declining in a linear fashion to reach their low point among the oldest cohort.
 - There are several possible explanations for this, including that older Veterans experienced fewer problems and, therefore, needed less help.
 - However, it also seems possible that, at least to some extent, older cohorts are less willing to admit problems and seek help, and special efforts to reach out to these Veterans may be warranted.
- Though a variety of problems were reported, the problems most frequently reported related to physical and mental health and post-discharge employment.
 - Perhaps the most positive result emerging from the data is that ratings of helpfulness were highest for government agency assistance with employment and job training and unemployment insurance.

Problems Experienced

- The incidence of problems experienced by Veterans varies depending on the problem being considered; however, two consistent patterns occur in the data:
 - First, the incidence of problems reported declines with age with considerable consistency.
 - Even when differences are not statistically significant, the pattern still holds in most cases.
 - Why the pattern occurs is less clear. Though problems could be more frequently experienced by younger cohorts, it also could be that younger Veterans feel more comfortable reporting problems than their older counterparts.
 - Second, the incidence of problems is typically higher for Enlisted Personnel than for Officers.
 - The following chart serves as an excellent example. In all six instances of reported problems the percentage declines with increasing age, and the percentage reporting no problems increases with age.



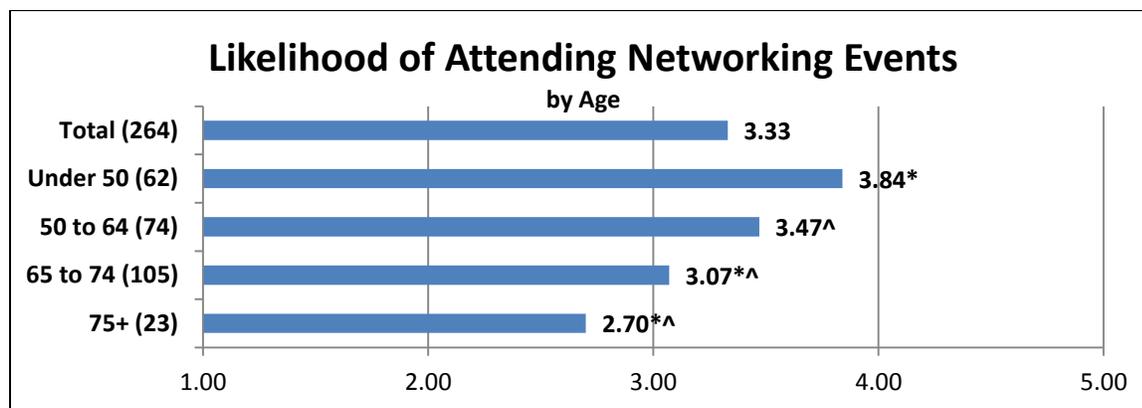
n's in parentheses. Only problems reported by at least 10% of sample are reported.

*percentages differ significantly at $p < .05$.

- The most frequently reported post-deployment problems are medical/health problems (31%) and psychological problems (30%).
- Half of Veterans (50%) report being identified by the V.A. as having a service-related disability.
 - Again, younger Veterans report a significantly higher percentage of disability classifications, ranging from a high of 68% among Veterans under age 50 to a low of 26% among those age 75 and older.
 - Among those identified as disabled, the largest percentage (19%) were classified as 100% disabled.
 - Contrary to the more frequently observed situation, a higher percentage of Officers (58%) report being disabled than Enlisted Personnel (50%).
- One-quarter (25%) of Veterans report experiencing problems with re-employment.
 - The age-based variation is again observed with 40% of Veterans under age 50 reporting problems and the percentage dropping to 9% among the oldest cohort.

Help Sought

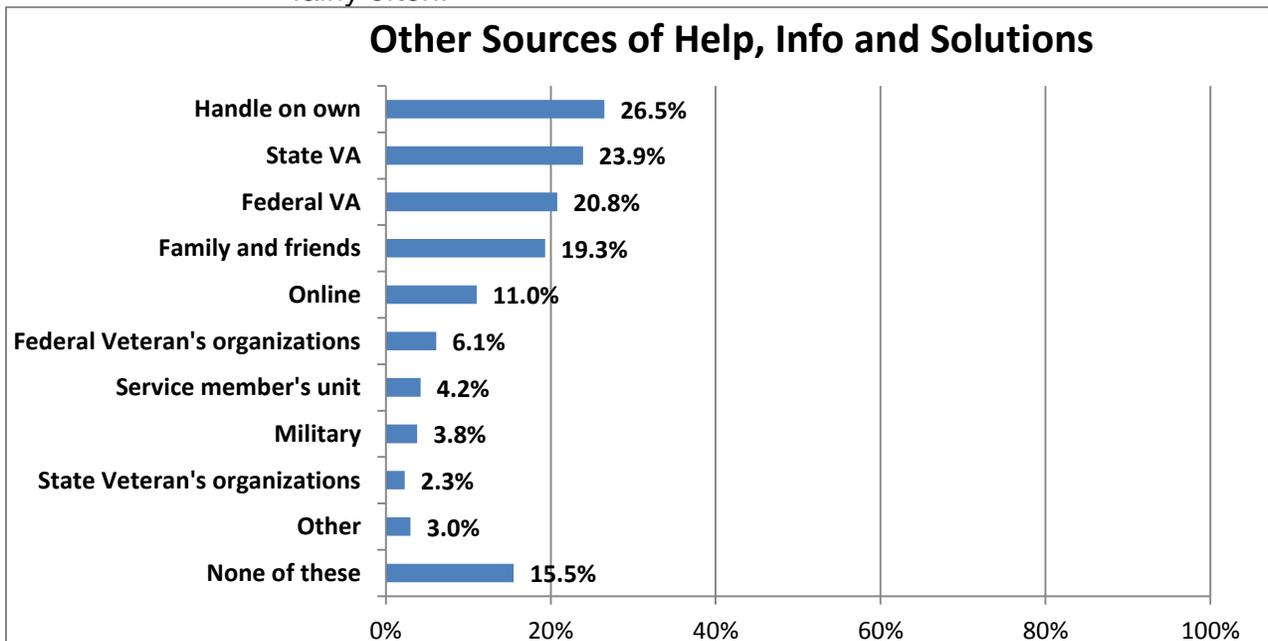
- Veterans are most likely to report seeking VA Benefits (61%) followed by Continuing Education (39%).
 - Segments did not differ significantly in terms of VA Benefits; however, significantly higher percentages of Marines (63%) and enlisted personnel (43%) report seeking Continuing Education.
 - Similar to results reported earlier, the percentage seeking VA Benefits declined significantly with age.
 - Only 11% of Veterans report seeking help from non-government organizations.
- Overall, 40% of Veterans used the Internet.
 - It is not surprising that using the Internet as a transition tool varies strongly with age from a high of 82% among Veterans under age 50 to a low of 13% among those at least 75 years of age.
- Over half (54%) of Veterans indicate that they would be "likely" or "very likely" to attend Veterans networking events.



n's in parentheses. *,^means differ significantly at $p < .05$.

- The familiar age-based pattern of increased participation from the younger cohorts is evident here as well.

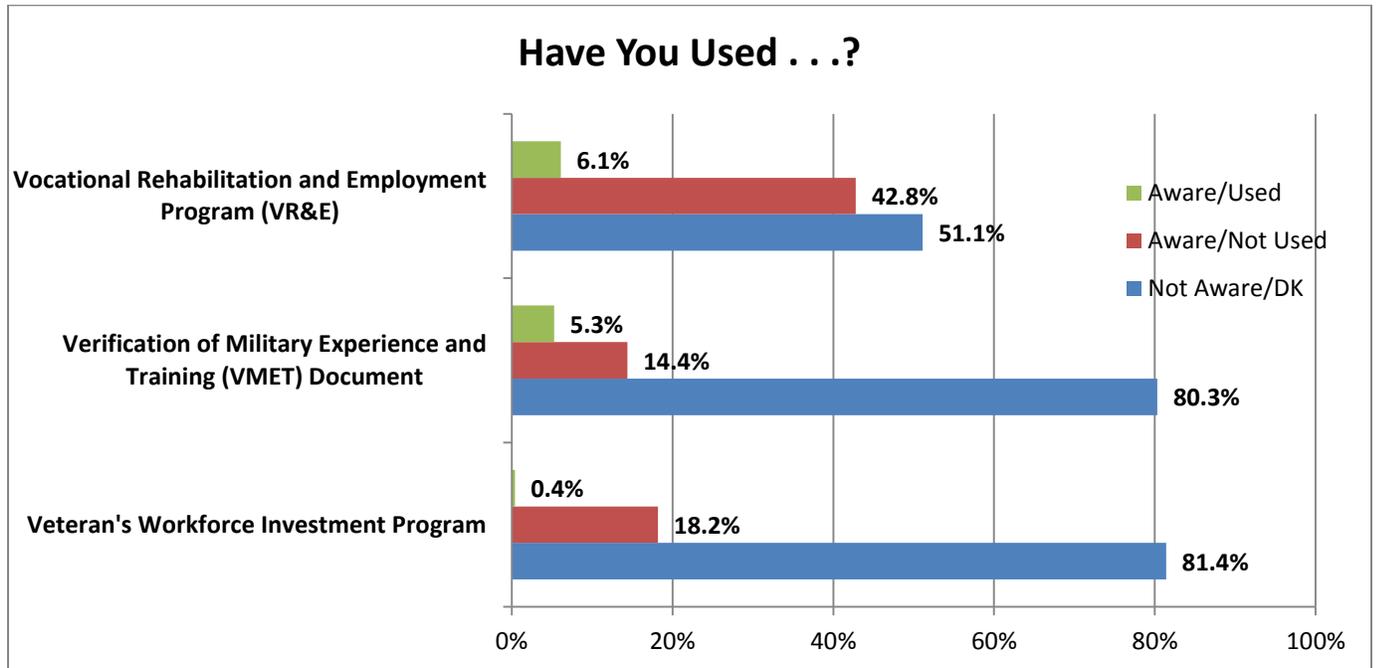
- The situation is similar with regard to registration for the eBenefits VA/DOD web portal.
 - Overall, 21% report basic registration and 22% report premium registration.
 - A large percentage (24%) report that they don't know if they are registered, indicating a need for improved dissemination of information.
 - Sharp age-related differences are again noted here, with the percentage reporting that they have not registered ranging from 16% among the youngest to 70% among the oldest age cohorts.
- The top discussion partners on resources and benefits that Veterans mention are other Veterans (31%), friends (25%), family (23%), a State VA Representative (23%), a spouse (19%), and a Federal VA Representative (19%).
 - In most cases, younger Veterans were more likely than older ones to report discussion.
- VA Representatives were mentioned by the largest percentage of Veterans (20%) as being most helpful in providing information on Veterans' resources and benefits.
 - Veterans Service Organizations (NGOs) (14%) and word-of-mouth (14%) were the next most frequently named as most helpful.
- Ironically, VA Representatives were also second most frequently mentioned as least helpful in providing information (11%).
 - The largest percentage of Veterans (16%) name word-of-mouth as least helpful.
- The largest percentage of Veterans (18%) indicate that they would first turn to the Federal VA for help, information, and solutions.
 - The percentage was nearly as high (17%) for Veterans who said they would handle such matters on their own.
 - Family and friends (17%) and the State VA (14%) were also named fairly often.



n = 264

- Secondary sources of help, information and solutions include oneself (27%), the State VA (24%), and the Federal VA (21%).
 - Significant age-related differences did not occur as frequently as elsewhere on these questions.
- The Federal VA (59%) and State VA (31%) were the most frequently named sources of help for Veterans who reported post-deployment medical or health problems.
 - The Federal VA was also named most frequently (44%) as the source of help by Veterans who experienced post-deployment mental problems.
 - No significant age or rank-related differences were noted.
- Fully 60% of Veterans with marital problems reported that they did not seek help from any of the sources tested.
 - The Federal VA was again the source of help most frequently mentioned (14%).
 - Similarly, 56% of the 27 Veterans reporting relationship problems with their children did not seek help from any of the sources tested, and 22% sought help from the Federal VA.
- The Federal VA was named as a help source by 14% of Veterans who reported financial or banking problems.
 - Over half (51%) reported not seeking help from the tested sources.
- The Federal VA (19%) and State VA (17%) were the most frequently named sources of help for Veterans who reported employment problems post-deployment.
 - Once again, the largest percentage (47%) did not seek help from a tested source.
- Reported use of the Veteran's Crisis line was very low ranging from 4% for phone use to 1% for text use.
 - Awareness appears relatively low as well with lack of awareness ranging from 40% for phone use to 52% for text use.
 - No significant age or rank-related differences were noted on these questions.
- Only 34 Veterans reported being a Veteran Small Business Owner or Service-Disabled Small Business Owner.
 - Of these, only two reported receiving help in starting their business.
 - Five Veterans reported using LAVetBiz, though none reported receiving contracts through this program.
 - Six Veterans reported being certified with the LED Hudson Initiative, and one reported receiving a contract based on this certification.
- As indicated earlier, 25% of Veterans report experiencing problems with re-employment after discharge.
 - The largest percentage (42%) said that they did not seek re-employment help.
 - Among Veterans who sought help, the largest percentages said they sought re-employment help online (28%), from the Federal VA (28%), and/or the State VA (21%).
 - Significant segment-related differences were found only for seeking online help, which was done much more frequently by the younger age cohorts.
- The big news with respect to three employment related resources for Veterans is lack of awareness.

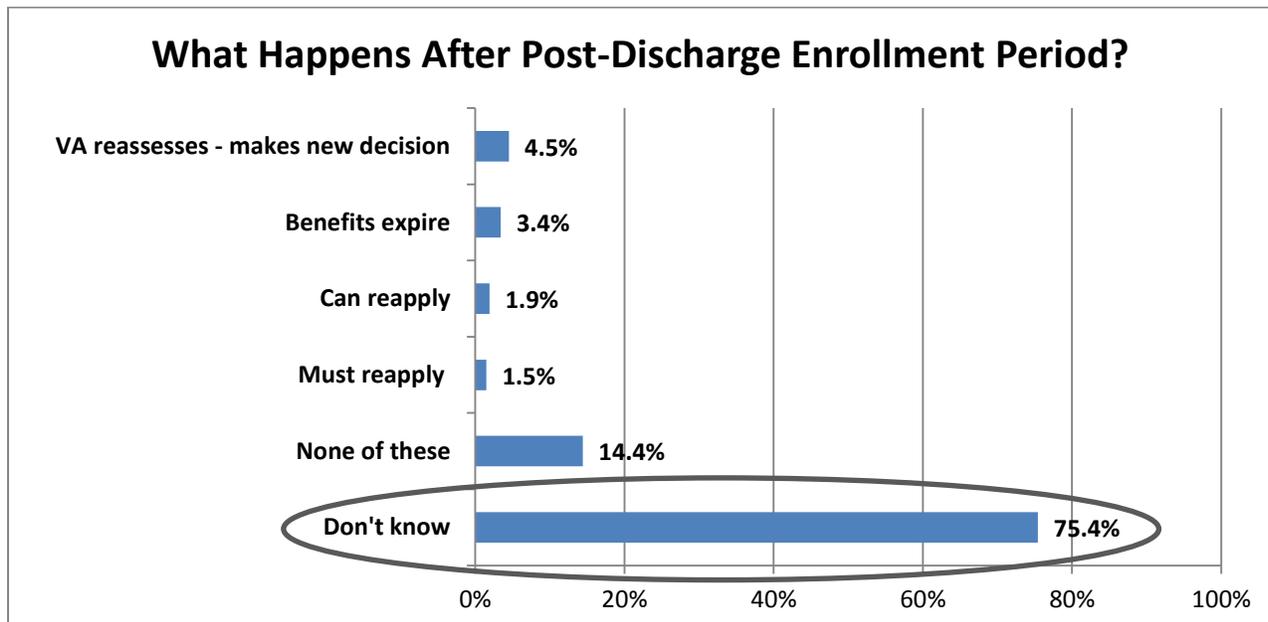
- The majority of Veterans are unaware of the VR&E program (51%), the VMET document (80%), and the Veteran's Workforce Investment Program (81%).
- Given low awareness, the very low levels of usage that are reported are not surprising (see chart below).
 - No significant cross-segment differences were noted.



n = 264

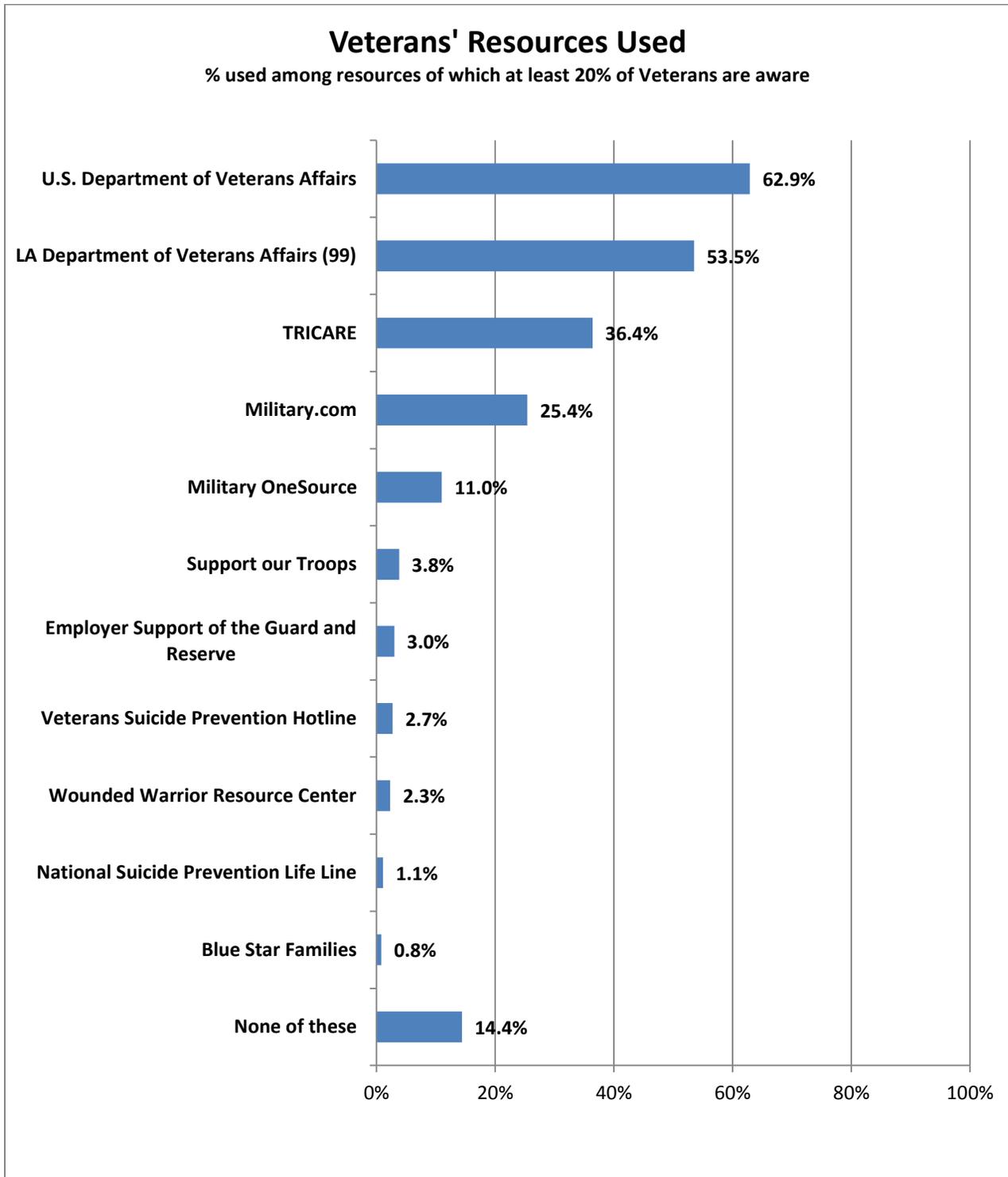
- Half (50%) of Veterans get their information about the VA and veteran's benefits online.
 - Over one-quarter (28%) get information in-person and 21% go through third parties.
 - Consistent with previous findings, the under 50 age cohort is most likely to seek information online (73%) and the 75 and older cohort is least likely to do so (35%).
- Over one-third (34%) of Veterans report having used a Vet Center.
 - Unlike most of the other matters studied, older Veterans are significantly more likely than younger ones to have used a Vet Center.
 - Medical/Health care referrals (50%), PTSD Counseling/Treatment (32%), and VA Benefits referral (30%) are the three most frequently used Vet Center services.
 - No significant rank or age-related differences were observed with regard to use of specific Vet Center resources.
- Veteran's health care benefits were applied for by 67% of Veterans.
 - The largest percentage (42%) applied for benefits in-person at a VA health care facility. This holds true among all age categories.
 - However, older Veterans were significantly more likely to apply for benefits in-person and significantly less likely to apply for benefits online.

- About 10% of Veterans report eligibility for advanced Combat Veterans benefits, and 23% say they don't know if they are eligible.
 - Sixty percent (60%) of those reporting eligibility indicate that they don't know for how long they are eligible.
 - Twenty percent (20%) report eligibility of 3 to 5 years.
 - Reported eligibility does vary significantly with age, ranging from 23% among the under 50 group to zero in the 75 and older group.
- As indicated in several instances that have previously been discussed, lack of awareness of availability of benefits and services appears often to be a problem.
 - Lack of awareness of what happens in the post-discharge enrollment period is very high with 75% indicating that they don't know.



n = 264

- The majority (56%) of Veterans have not participated in education programs.
 - The largest percentages that have used these programs participated in the Montgomery G.I. Bill (26%) and the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill (13%).
 - In both instances, younger Veterans participate at significantly higher rates than older Veterans.
 - Though the differences are not significant, older Veterans are more likely than others to report participating in on the job training.
 - Veterans in the oldest cohort were substantially more likely to report not participating in any education program (74%) than the youngest cohort (34%).
 - The service member is the person most likely to have participated in or be participating in education programs (51%).
- No fewer than two-thirds (66%) of Veterans report awareness of any of the transition events tested.
 - In most instances, over 75% were unaware of the event.
- Over 80%, and in many cases over 90%, of Veterans were not aware of 15 of 27 Veterans' resources that were tested.
 - However, over half report having used the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (63%) or the Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs (53%).



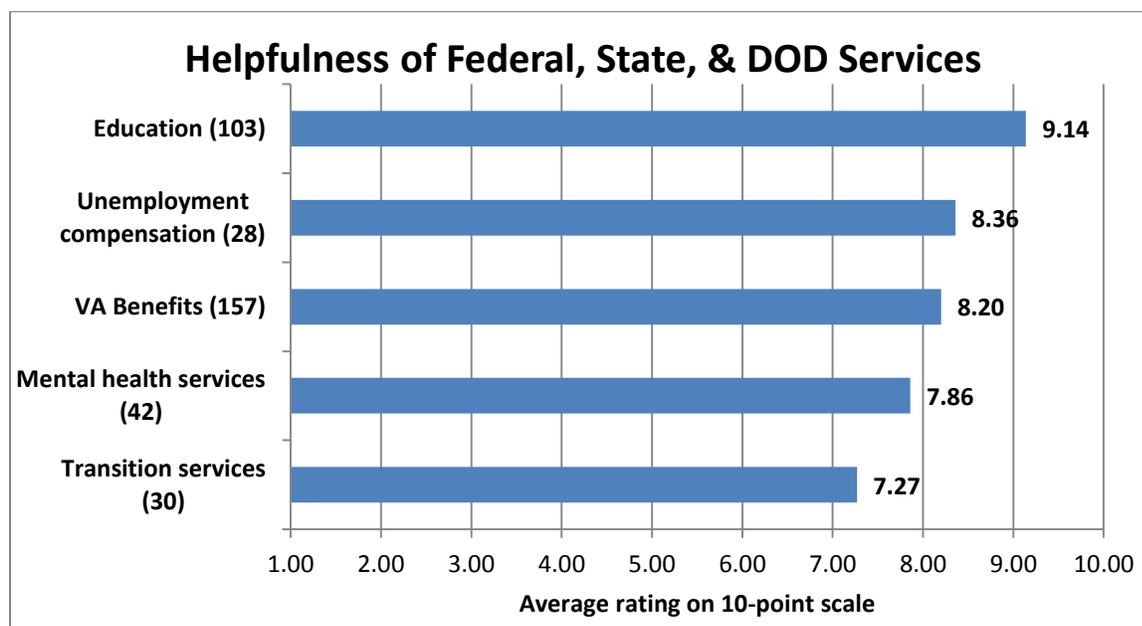
n = 264 unless otherwise indicated in parentheses.

Biggest Problems, Best Answers

- The four biggest transition difficulties indicated by Veterans were related to employment (25%), mental health issues (21%), personal finances (12%) and physical health (10%).
- The most frequently mentioned best sources of help were family (33%), other Veterans (19%), a spouse (12%), and friends (8%).
 - The absence of any governmental or other institutional sources of help from the above list is hard not to notice.
 - No significant age or rank-related differences were noted.

Rating the Programs and Services

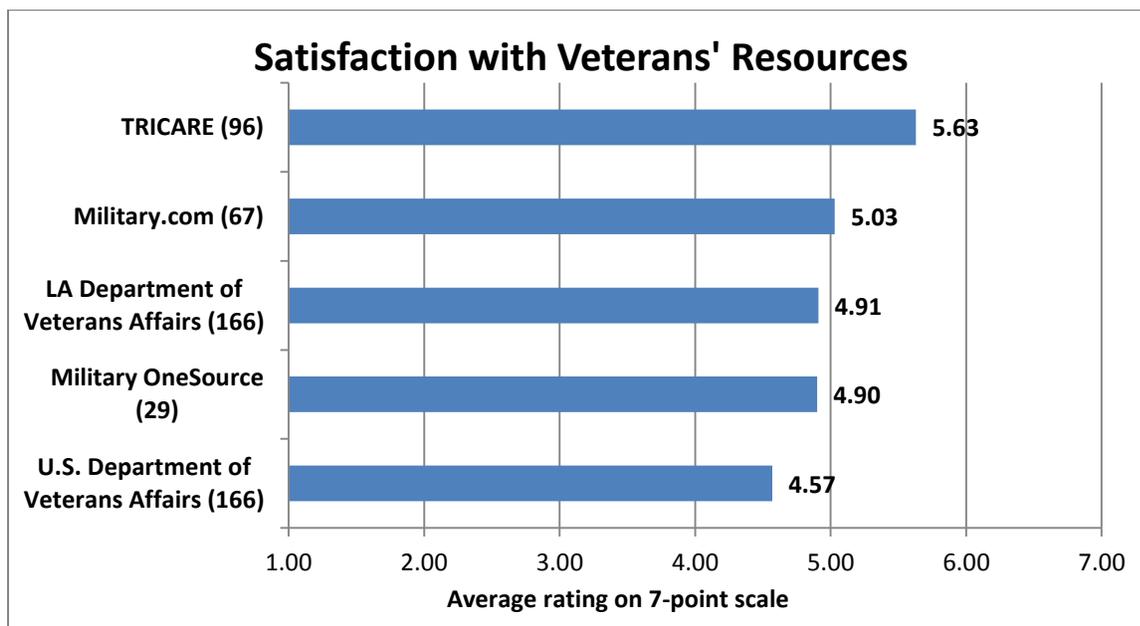
- Education services received highest ratings from Veterans who indicated that they had used them (see chart below).
 - Mental health services and transition services receive reasonably high ratings, though there is room for improvement.
 - No significant cross-segment differences were noted.



n's in parentheses. Only services used by 20 or more Veterans presented.

- In assessing ease of use of materials provided by the VA and ease of dealing with the VA, Veterans' did not give high ratings.
 - On a 5-point scale in which "5" was "very easy," average scores were, at best, middle of the road for written materials from the VA (3.00), the VA enrollment process (2.78), and getting needed details from VA (2.67).
 - There no significant cross-segment differences.
- A sufficient number of Veterans reported using only three Vet Center services to merit attention to the ratings given.
 - Satisfaction with these services (used by at least 20 Veterans) were rated on a 7-point scale with "7" meaning "completely satisfied."

- Satisfaction was mediocre for VA benefit referrals (4.59), medical or health care referrals (4.47), and PTSD counseling (4.34).
- The situation is the same with regard to VA health care services.
 - On an 11-point satisfaction scale, these services receive only a mediocre satisfaction rating of 5.98.
 - No significant age or rank-related differences were found.
- Veterans' ratings of the difficulty they had in obtaining education or job training benefits and of their satisfaction with these benefits were neither exceptionally high nor low.
 - On the 11-point rating scale, the 154 Veterans who reported seeking these benefits rated difficulty an average of 7.21 and satisfaction an average of 7.78 (high scale values represent "very easy" and "very satisfied").
 - Once again, no significant cross-segment differences were found.
- Of the various transition events and programs that were tested, only two were utilized by more than ten Veterans – the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) classes (n = 57) and the Pre-Discharge Program (n = 20).
 - The value and helpfulness of the TAP classes was rated an average of 7.98, and Pre-Discharge Program was rated an average of 7.38 on a 10-point scale.
 - The ease of using the Pre-Discharge program received an average rating of 4.06 on a 7-point scale with "7" representing "extremely easy."
- Finally, of the 27 Veterans' resources tested, only five were used by more than 20 Veterans.
 - TRICARE received the highest satisfaction ratings among these, with an average of 5.63 on a 7-point scale.



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