

2020

## Lived Experience of Veterans with Service-Linked PTSD Utilizing Non-Clinical Employment Programs

Reina Diana Cubbage  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Reina Diana Cubbage

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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Walden University  
2020

Abstract

Lived Experience of Veterans with Service-Linked PTSD Utilizing Non-Clinical  
Employment Programs

by

Reina Diana Cubbage

MS, South University, 2010

BS, Georgia Southern University, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

I/O Psychology

Walden University

May 2020

## Abstract

Currently, employment programs for veterans focus heavily on the clinical nature of veterans with service-linked PTSD, with little to no focus on the lived experience of non-clinical employment programs. The purpose of this qualitative study explored the lived experience of male veterans with service-linked PTSD utilizing non-clinical employment programs designed to assist them in finding and maintaining employment while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. This study utilized an explanatory case study design with a sample of 8 male combat veterans with service-linked PTSD who have utilized non-clinical employment programs. Data for this study were collected through interviews with the use of a semi-structured interview guide. This study was guided by Schlossberg's Theory of Transition and sought to examine how combat veterans with service-linked PTSD describe the challenges they have with finding and retaining employment after being deployed from the military and the type of support they received from employment programs. The findings indicate that improvements need to be made with the employment programs in order to improve the employability of veterans with service-linked PTSD transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. Implications for social change consists of employment programs and agencies helping veterans with service linked PTSD seek and maintain successful employment, which is vital to the work-life transition of these veterans from the military into the civilian workforce.

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## Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation work to my close family and my friends that have served in the United States military. I would also like to dedicate this work to the brave veterans that have honorably served in the Unites States military.

I also dedicate this work to my husband, Alex, and our daughters, Amelia Rose and Reilly Jean, who have supported me and mostly motivated me to finally finish my dissertation journey that was started long ago. I will always remember your words of encouragement while I worked tirelessly to write these special 5 chapters.

A special dedication to my parents, Pamela Williams and Michael Heard Sr., who taught me the importance of pursuing an education. Also, I would like to thank my parents for the service in the military. Thank you for teaching us to appreciate our country and the military men and women that honorably served this country.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my identical twin sister, Rena, who has been with me throughout all my educational endeavors. Thank you for encouraging me and praying for me to finally finish my dissertation. Thank you!

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### **Introduction to the Study**

Each year, veterans with service-linked PTSD face the difficult challenge of transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. As the growing numbers of post-9/11 veterans return from deployments in Afghanistan or Iraq, many are also increasingly being diagnosed with service-linked post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) even as they transition into the civilian workforce. The Veterans Administration (VA) and other organizations must determine how to provide these veterans with the appropriate resources and services. As veterans differ from any other population, vocational development and employment services following military service are crucial, especially for veterans with service-linked PTSD or other mental health-related disabilities (Barnes, 2019; Harrod, Miller, Henry, & Zivin, 2017; Wyse, Pogoda, Mastarone, Gilbert, & Carlson, 2018).

Employment programs are an important aspect of the services and resources that can be provided to those seeking employment. Currently, employment programs that exist focus more on the clinical nature of veterans and service-linked PTSD in a clinical setting, whereas this study focused on exploring the lived experience of veterans with PTSD participating in employment programs. Currently, little to no research exists with regard to exploring the lived experience of veterans who participate in programs that help the employability of veterans with service-linked PTSD find and retain employment (Harrod et al., 2017). This study offers a better understanding to the ways in which these vocational programs support combat veterans with service-linked PTSD in finding and sustaining competitive employment.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experience of male veterans with service-linked PTSD utilizing non-clinical employment programs designed to assist them in finding and maintaining employment. Males were the focus of this research study because there are more males that are in combat than females. Females are relatively new to combat deployments in the United States military. This study has potential social implications for the population of veterans with service-linked PTSD as they transition into the civilian workplace. The social implications of veterans with service-linked PTSD gaining competitive employment were essential to the work-life transition and satisfaction of these individuals.

This chapter begins with the contextual information regarding PTSD, experiences that veterans with service-linked PTSD face while transitioning into the civilian world, and the challenges experienced by veterans when seeking and maintaining employment. The chapter further discusses the significance of veteran's transition into the civilian workforce post military service. Additionally, specific ways in which these vocational programs assist combat veterans with service-linked PTSD in finding work as well as providing them with skills and other resources to remain employed after they are employed are explored. Also, a discussion of the utilization of a qualitative approach is presented in this chapter. Specifically, the qualitative design that was used for this study was an explanatory case study design. Additionally, this chapter introduces the theoretical framework—Schlossberg's (1981) Theory of Transition—as well as defined several key terms and definitions. Lastly, assumptions, delimitations, and limitations were also discussed as it relates to this study.

## **Background**

PTSD is defined as a mental health disorder due to trauma in general; however, for combat veterans, service-linked PTSD can involve a more complex definition and involves a scale-like assessment and psychological interviews by psychologist and psychiatrist to be officially diagnosed (Department of Veteran Affairs, 2017; Marx, et al., 2017). PTSD is an initiated mental illness subsequent to a horrific event and can occur over months or even years after the initiating trauma (Johnson, 2017). These events can be defined as distress after an event such as an active war zone and can affect combat veterans with service-linked PTSD in many ways. Comorbidities of PTSD include depression, substance use disorders, and increased substance use (Ford, 2017; Raab, Mackintosh, Gros, & Morland, 2015).

The documented effects that American military war veterans with service-linked PTSD face once home from a war-related combat zone can vary on a simple scale ranging from mild, moderate, to severe. Once diagnosed with service-linked PTSD, many combat veterans find themselves depressed, facing sleeplessness, shell-shocked, stressed, suffering from night terrors, and/or hallucinations (Ghadami, Khaledi-Paveh, Nasouri, & Khazaie, 2015; Kimbrel et al., 2015; Pease, Billera, & Gerard, 2016). Service-linked PTSD among combat veterans is very prevalent. For example, according to the Department of Veteran Affairs, (2017), PTSD affects approximately 31% of Vietnam veterans, 10% of Desert Storm veterans, 11% of Afghanistan veterans, and 20% of Iraqi veterans. Additionally, a recent meta-analysis found that approximately 23% of veterans returning from Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) develop service-linked PTSD (Zalta et al., 2018).

Witnessing and participating in combat-related events can have a range of harmful psychological outcomes on veterans including mental health problems (e.g., PTSD) and other mental health-related issues such as, depression or anxiety. Additionally, individuals with service-linked PTSD are less likely to return to work, and some of these symptoms could be associated with and or mimic other mental health issues (Giummarra et al., 2017). These outcomes have been well documented (Hijazi, Keith, & O'Brien, 2015; Meyers, Haller, Angkaw, Harik, & Norman, 2019). As a result, there are a variety of challenges that combat veterans with service-linked PTSD face daily when trying to reintegrate into the civilian workforce from combat (Sayer, Carlson, & Frazier, 2014). Research on the management of combat veterans with service-linked PTSD indicates that these individuals are less likely than those without service-linked PTSD to be employed, especially as symptom levels become more severe or are explicitly related to combat (Hijazi et al., 2015; Kerr et al., 2018).

Upon returning home from combat, many veterans with service-linked PTSD are in need of debriefing counseling and possibly several more alternative coping programs or techniques to maintain an optimal well-being as they transition into the civilian workforce (Freyes, LeLaurin, Zickmund, Resende, & Uphold, 2017). Returning veterans are often considered to be in their prime years of employability; therefore, employment is a high priority among this group of veterans (Pease et al., 2016). Veterans with service-linked PTSD are more likely than those without service-linked PTSD to be unemployed, and unemployment is greater for those veterans with more severe cases of service-linked PTSD (Sripada et al., 2018). Combat veterans with service-linked PTSD often face challenges in relation to meeting the educational and experience employment

qualifications in the civilian workplace (Bergman & Herd, 2017; Stone & Stone, 2015). These challenges play an important role in their ability to maintain employment. Specifically, issues that affect veterans with service-linked PTSD and negatively impact employment success include limited support systems, lack of transportation, education, and finances (Davis et al., 2014; Kukla, Bonfils, & Salyers, 2015).

Veterans with service-linked PTSD experience more issues related to work performance than veterans without service-linked PTSD (Pease et al., 2016; Sripada et al., 2018). A major concern for individuals with a mental illness, such as PTSD, is the lack of attachment to the workplace (Lu et al., 2017). One of the challenges that veterans with service-linked PTSD experience after being employed centers around stigmas and stereotype experiences (Brown & Bruce, 2016). According to both Yanchus, Osatuke, Carameli, Barnes, and Ramsel (2014) and Castro, Kintzle, and Hassan (2014), post-9/11 combat veterans reported a belief that civilian employers did not understand military veterans' needs, did not think military veterans have necessary skills, considered veterans to be dangerous and physically broken, and did not want to hire veterans. Brown and Bruce (2016) stated that along with the diagnoses of service-linked PTSD in combat veterans comes the stigma and stereotyping of these individuals, especially in the workplace and within American society. Thorne, Devline, and Dingess (2017) emphasized that the attitudes towards individuals with mental illnesses may have detrimental effects to the adjustment and quality of life of these individuals.

One of the ways in which combat veterans with service-linked PTSD can find employment is through employment programs sponsored by the VA. The Department of Veterans Affairs' Veterans Health Administration (VHA) offers a variety of employment



services, of which thousands of veterans with service-linked PTSD have access to and normally utilize. The employment programs in which combat veterans with service-linked PTSD can participate include, but are not limited to, (1) Veterans Employment Center (VEC), (2) Veteran Employment Service Office (VESO), and (3) Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment ([VR & E], VA, 2018b).

Furthermore, the United States Department of Labor ([DOL], 2018b) provides services that range from (1) résumé building, (2) employment workshops, (3) meeting with a pre-separation counselor, and (4) military transition assessments, to name a few. When veterans with service-linked PTSD are in need of specialized employment assistance they are required to call their respective employment to begin this complex process, depending on their branch of service (DOL, 2018a). Once a determination of needs and wants are made, veterans are required to complete an employment transition assessment (DOL, 2018a). Combat veterans are required to register for a workshop tailored to military veteran's transition into the civilian workplace, contingent on assessment results (DOL, 2018b; VA, 2018b). The workshop is composed of numerous topics with subtopics of employment subjects that focus on employment transition. Veterans are required to participate in these workshops if they are seeking employment in order to successfully transition into the workplace.

The goal of these employment programs is to help veterans obtain and maintain employment in the civilian world (Harrod et al., 2017; Meinert, 2016). Most of these employment services are considered external services that are mainly resources outside the VA in which veterans are encouraged to utilize. For instance, the VA's (2018b) website provides a list of employment resources and their relevant services available,

depending on the needs of the veterans (e.g., on-the-job training, resume creation, vocational rehabilitation programs, career counseling). These resources and services may help combat veterans seeking employment gain a respectable career and possibly maintain work based on their needs. Locations of these programs vary depending on the state in which the veteran utilizes the service or resource (DOL, 2018c; VA, 2018b). Current data do not establish a starting point for evaluating the satisfaction of veterans' career paths or demonstrate how program involvement may contribute significantly to the aftereffects of combat veteran employability program participation (Harris et al., 2017). According to Robertson and Brott (2014), researchers examined retirement satisfaction and adjustment, career adaptability and adjustment, as well as adjustment post-deployment; however, few studies have examined the overall life satisfaction of veterans experiencing career transitions, specifically examining veterans' experiences. The U.S. Department of Labor (2018c) utilization profile estimates that at least 48% of its veterans use its programs and services that are available to veterans. Of these veterans, it is estimated that the number who utilize employment services and programs is relatively steady (DOL, 2018c). Davis et al. (2012) reported that unemployed veterans with service-linked PTSD who received Individual Placement and Support (IPS) were 2.7 times more likely to gain competitive employment than those who received Vocational Rehabilitation Placement (VRP). These programs can be found worldwide, and veterans are encouraged to utilize these services as they are transitioning into the civilian workplace. Although these programs provide a range of resources aimed at the employability of combat veterans with service-linked PTSD, it is not known how

veterans' participation in these programs has helped them in finding or maintaining successful employment.

With limited data on veterans with service-linked veterans' employability programs effectiveness, it is difficult for stakeholders to conclude which efforts are working, how combat veterans with service-linked PTSD use available employment resources, and which employability programs could be duplicated to fill career needs and advanced opportunities. Julian and Valente (2015) emphasized that this further implies a crucial need to evaluate employment programs aimed at maintaining the employability of combat veterans with service-linked PTSD. Therefore, it is imperative to examine the effects of combat veterans with service-linked PTSD and their experiences within these employment programs that are aimed at the increasing the employability of combat veterans with service-linked PTSD.

### **Problem Statement**

Each year, thousands of individuals end their military service. A significant number of these individuals leave the military with a service-linked diagnosis of PTSD (Brancu et al., 2017; Murphy, Busuttill, & Turgoose, 2018; Rosenblatt et al., 2018). These combat veterans mainly served in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), but also include those that have served in previous conflicts such as Vietnam, the Korean War, and Desert Storm. The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (2018) estimates that 8 out of every 100 veterans have service-linked PTSD.

There are several challenges that these combat veterans with service-linked PTSD face daily. Many of these combat veterans with service-linked PTSD have a difficult

time adjusting back to civilian and work-life after being put in situations where combat-related wartime trauma has taken place (Bennett et al., 2015; Smith, 2015). These veterans with service-linked PTSD are more likely to have some difficulty finding employment compared to their civilian counterparts, contributing to the overall percentage of unemployed combat veterans (Keeling, Ozuna, Kintzle, & Castro, 2018; Phillips & Edelson, 2015; Vogt et al., 2017). Harrod et al. (2017) found that nearly 35% of these veterans had difficulty completing tasks potentially affecting their work productivity, and nearly 25% experienced job loss. Furthermore, veterans with service-linked PTSD tended to miss more workdays, were unhappy with their employment, and had difficulty getting along with their co-workers when compared to civilians (Chang, Mueller, Resnick, Osatuke, & Eisen, 2016; Harrod et al., 2017).

The military has developed clinical and non-clinical service-linked PTSD programs to support veterans and facilitate a positive transition from combat-related deployment to the civilian world (VA, 2018b). The non-clinical service-linked PTSD programs that the VA (2018a) provides include housing, education, financial, travel, training, and employment programs. The employment programs include vocational rehabilitation and employment, America's Service Locator, and state vocational rehabilitation agencies. According to the VA (2018b), many of these services are considered external services that are mainly provided outside the VA which veterans are encouraged to utilize. The VA is not directly responsible for these vocational programs, nor does it provide oversight of these agencies. For example, the U.S. Department of Labor awarded Pima County in Arizona, a \$236,654 grant for a Homeless Veterans' Re-integration Program to connect veterans in need with stable employment, but will

only receive the grant continuously if 100 veterans are enrolled in the program consistently (Khmara, 2017). There are several of these types of employment programs for combat veterans with service-linked PTSD; however, it is not known how effective these programs have been in increasing the employability of combat veterans with service-linked PTSD. Routon (2014) emphasized that combat veterans employment outcomes change over time, and these changes can be attributed to changes in the economy, military policy, civilian transitional vocational training, military experience, and several other factors.

There is a need to explore the lived experience of veterans with service-linked PTSD who have participated in these non-clinical employment programs in assisting combat veterans with service-linked PTSD to find and retain employment (Harrod et al., 2017). There is a dearth of published studies related to the utilization and of these employment programs and the ways in which they help veterans with service-linked PTSD. As such, this study sought to explore the lived experience of veterans with service-linked PTSD who have used or participated in non-clinical employment programs designed to assist veterans with service-linked PTSD in finding and maintaining employment.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and gain a deeper understanding of the lived experience of veterans with serviced-linked PTSD who have participated or utilized non-clinical employment programs designed to assist combat veterans with service-linked PTSD in finding and maintaining successful employment. The goal of this study was to better understand and explore the specific ways in which

these programs assisted combat veterans with service-linked PTSD in finding work as well as providing them with skills and other resources to remain employed after they start working. The study participants were male veterans who are diagnosed with service-linked PTSD and have utilized non-clinical employment programs to find and retain employment.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the proposed qualitative study:

1. How do combat veterans with service-linked PTSD describe the challenges they have with finding and retaining employment after being deployed from the military?
2. How do combat veterans with service-linked PTSD describe the type of support they received from employment programs in finding and retaining employment?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Concepts derived from Schlossberg's (1981) Theory of Transition, which was developed in the 1980s, was used to guide this study. This theory explains the transitions that a person experiences as he or she moves from one state or condition to another, as well as the ways that they cope with incorporating the event into their life (Evans, Forney, & Guido, 1998). Theoretical frameworks are commonly utilized to guide qualitative studies (Anfara & Mertz, 2015). Additionally, theoretical frameworks in qualitative research are used to construct a methodological approach or the epistemological paradigms that direct a study (Anfara & Mertz, 2015). According to Schlossberg's Theory of Transition, the change from one experience or non-event results

in transformed relationships, habits, expectations, and roles (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Schlossberg's Theory of Transition consists of four main components known as the Four Ss: (1) situation, (2) self, (3) social support, and (4) strategies (Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015; Stokes, Schultz, & Alpasan, 2018). The first 'S,' the *situation*, takes into consideration everything involved in the transition situation (Evans, 2010). For example, what triggered the transition? Is the person experiencing the transition in control or out of control in the situation? Is it permanent, such as the inability to work? What stress is present? Are there other stressors occurring at the same time?

The second 'S,' the *self*, looks at the personal characteristics of how the individual perceive their life and the transition (Reppert, Buzzetta, & Rose, 2014). According to Schlossberg et al. (1995), personal and demographic characteristics such as gender, socioeconomic status, stage of life, state of health, ethnicity, and age affects how a person transitions. The third 'S' of the theory, *social support*, is often viewed as a significant part to the management of the transition of veterans diagnosed with PTSD (Drebig et al., 2018). Veterans with service-linked PTSD need lots of support. These supports can include immediate family, friends, or VA support with the use of non-clinical services. For this study, the focus was on employment programs. Finally, the fourth 'S', *strategies*, refers to the ways individuals cope with a transition (Reppert et al., 2014). Coping responses include those that modify the situation, control the meaning of the problem, and aid in the managing of stress.

Schlossberg's (1981) four 'S' components include individual and psychosomatic influences which dictate how change can have control on the outcome of one's situation, whether it was foreseen or unexpected (Greer, 2017). Combat veterans who are

diagnosed with service-linked PTSD may have or not have anticipated this transition from the military into the civilian workforce in life. The idea that these life changes put emphasis on the probability of overcoming one's previous shortcoming, speaks volumes to the idea of success after deployment in finding and maintaining employment.

Schlossberg's (1981) Theory of Transition was used as a framework to explain the situation, self, social support, and strategies that combat veterans with service-linked PTSD encounter when seeking and maintaining employment. The social support component of Schlossberg's (1981) Theory of Transition was used to explore how veterans' support system will either positively or negatively affect their transition to civilian employment. For the purpose of this study, employment programs were the support system that was explored. The strategy component was used to explore how the support these veterans received from the employment programs help them cope with their employment situations after participation in the program.



### **Nature of the Study**

This study utilized a qualitative approach. The specific qualitative design that was used for this study was an explanatory case study design. Qualitative research was the most appropriate methodology for this particular study because it facilitated a deeper understanding and context of how non-clinical employment programs assist combat veterans with service-linked PTSD in finding and maintaining employment. Qualitative research emphasizes a more in-depth subjective approach and the data can easily be collected in ways particularly appropriate for new or understudied empirical contexts where there is relatively little prior work, as in this case (Bansal, Smith, & Vaara, 2018).

The cases of this study were male combat veterans with service-linked PTSD who would have participated or utilized employment programs. The use of an explanatory case study design facilitated answers to the proposed research questions pertaining to the combat veterans with service-linked PTSD who have participated or utilized employment programs post-deployment. Yin (2003) who is often cited as the foundational methodologist in the area of case study research notes that there are three general types of case studies: (1) exploratory, descriptive or explanatory. Yin (2003) notes that "how" and "why" questions are more explanatory because such questions deal with operational links over time. Based on Yin (2003) the current research study specifically utilized an explanatory case study design which generally explores data closely to explain a phenomenon. Case studies are beneficial in research when behavior cannot be manipulated. Furthermore, case studies usually use a range of evidence from different sources including documents, artifacts, interviews and observation, and also go beyond

the range of sources of evidence that was available in past research (Rowley, 2002). For the purpose of this study, interviews were the primary data collection method.

The four main branches of the United States (U.S.) military that included in this study were the Air Force, Marine Corps, Navy, and Army. The U.S. Coast Guard was excluded from this study because they are not considered a primary military branch. A non-probability sampling approach was utilized for this study and is defined as a non-random number of sampling of participants (Guetterman, 2015). The sample size for this explanatory case study was eight male combat veterans with service-linked PTSD. With only eight participants, two veterans were recruited from each of the four primary branches of the military to participate in the study because case studies usually use small sample sizes given the volume of data collected. Case study designs generally utilize small sample sizes (Yin, 1994). Furthermore, Creswell (2007) recommends a sample size of a minimum of six cases for qualitative case studies. The first two study participants from each of the four branches of the military who met the inclusion criteria were selected to participate in the study.

Purposeful snowball sampling was utilized for this research study. Purposeful sampling is the strategy of identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are familiar with or experienced with a topic of interest (Palinkas et al., 2015). Snowball sampling is the selection of participants through referrals by previously selected participants or persons who have access to potential participants (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Combat veterans with service-linked PTSD who agreed to participate in the study were asked if they know other veterans who might have an interest in participating in the study.

To be eligible for participation in this study veterans had to meet the following inclusion criteria: must (1) have served in any form of combat; (2) be clinically diagnosed with service-linked PTSD; (3) have served in one of the four of the primary branches of the U.S. military; (4) be between 25 and 60 years of age; (5) be male; and (6) have participated in or at least received some service from an employment program or agency. Participants were recruited through the employment programs that serve combat veterans with service-linked PTSD. In addition, participants were recruited using flyers (see Appendix A) that were circulated on military installations, as well as, social media. An approval letter was obtained from the military installation in order to post the flyer. Participants were screened to determine if they met the inclusion criteria. Data were collected via interviews with combat veterans lasting no more than 60 minutes. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix B). Additionally, interviews were audio-recorded with each participant's permission. Local participants had the option to meet face-to-face, virtually, or to be interviewed by phone. Moser and Korstjens (2018) suggested the use of a semi-structured interview guide in which a researcher would start with open questions associated to the topic that also that invites the participant to talk freely. This created a free-flowing interview and gave ample room for follow-up questions.

### **Definitions**

The following section provides an overview of the definitions of the key terms and concepts that were used in this study. Some of the key terms have interchangeable terms.

*Combat Veterans* are service members that are serving or have served in a combat zone in the U.S. military often with a deployment tour history (Van Voorhees et al., 2018).

*Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* is a severe mental illness following a horrific event and can occur over months or even years (Johnson, 2017).

*Veterans* are individuals that are serving or have served in the primary branches of the United States military (Carter, 2017).

*Vocational Programs* are programs designed to prepare individuals to gain employment or search for employment in order to become employed. These programs are also referred to as employment programs or workforce programs (Webster et al., 2018).

### **Assumptions**

There were several assumptions that were made in regard to this study. This study made the assumption that the participants involved will respond to the interview questions thoughtfully and honestly. The types of questions to be asked in the semi-structured interview guide were not be that of a self-incriminating nature and should not warrant any false statements or responses. Another assumption is that the sample size is suitable and consequently assured that the participants involved collectively shared similar experiences. A third assumption is that the study participants will have an interest in participating in the proposed study. Few studies have engaged veterans diagnosed with service-linked PTSD regarding their perspectives and experiences in employment programs. As such, there were reasons to consider that this study provided individuals with an exceptional opportunity to do so. These assumptions are necessary in order to

identify and discuss because participants have the influence to affect the validity of the results from this study.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This study intended to address the lived experience of male veterans who are diagnosed with service-linked PTSD who participate in vocational programs for employment. The scope of this study was limited to male combat veterans with service-linked PTSD who have received services from employment programs. These particular veterans were selected because they will be the most knowledgeable on the subject of workplace transition and employability. This study did not include any non-combat veterans. Data were collected with the use of semi-structured interviews with each combat veteran. Interviews were no more than 60 minutes and were audio-recorded with each participant's permission. The interviews were conducted using semi-structured interview guides. Local participants had the option to meet in person or be interviewed by phone.

### **Limitations**

This qualitative study utilized a non-probability sampling approach. Therefore, one key limitation of this study was that the findings are not generalizable to other veterans with service-linked PTSD who have utilized non-clinical employment programs. Another related limitation is that the sample size is relatively small. Eight veterans were recruited to participate in the study, which also limits the generalizability of the findings to other veterans. Given the relatively small sample size, the experiences of the veterans who participate in the study may not be representative of other veterans with service-linked PTSD. It is important to note that the researcher had no personal or professional

relationships with any of the veterans who will volunteer and be selected to participate in the study. Finally, there was no conflict of interest regarding the researcher's own work environment and that of the participants because the researcher is not employed by the military or at any employment agencies.

### **Significance**

This study is significant because the results provided information regarding the extent to which non-clinical employment programs assist combat veterans with service-linked PTSD find and retain employment. More specifically, study findings help to better understand the challenges that combat veterans with service-linked PTSD face when looking for and retaining employment after being deployed from the military, and how the services that the employment programs provide assisted combat veterans with service-linked PTSD to locate employment.

Knowing the extent to which these employment programs are working to the benefit of veterans with service-linked PTSD helped to further justify and promoted the utilization of these types of programs by combat veterans with service-linked PTSD. Study findings were also very insightful to leadership of these employment programs as well civilian employers in terms of veterans' experiences with the programs. The findings of this study helped to inform the need for development of more effective VA employment programs for combat veterans with service-linked PTSD. Enhancing the efficiency of these employment programs for combat veterans with service-linked PTSD may improve quality of life for veterans and reduce costs to the United States' government. The study is also significant because it contributed to the gaps in the literature related to non-clinical employment programs that serve combat veterans with

service-linked PTSD. Currently, there are very few published studies pertaining to non-clinical service-linked PTSD employment programs, and most of the studies that have been conducted related to workforce participation for veterans have generally focused on clinical transitions of veterans with service-linked PTSD.

### **Summary**

Chapter 1 introduced the many challenges veterans with service-linked PTSD face as they transition from the military to the civilian workplace. This chapter also delineated the significance of the study to be conducted because the findings helped to better understand the types of challenges that combat veterans with service-linked PTSD faced when looking for, as well as retaining employment after being deployed from the military. Findings from this study also helped understand how the services that the employment programs provided assisted combat veterans with service-linked PTSD to find employment. Background information defining PTSD was also presented in addition to the effects of service-linked PTSD for veterans' post-deployment after leaving the military. Having an understanding of the actual mental illness was crucial to understanding one of the many challenges that veterans face. Furthermore, the challenges that combat veterans with service-linked PTSD faced had an important role in their ability to maintain employment. Davis et al. (2014) specifically discussed the issues veterans with service-linked PTSD face that impact employment success and included support system, lack of transportation, education, and finances. Methods in which combat veterans with service-linked PTSD can find employment are essential to understanding the effects that participating in employment programs can have in supporting this population of individuals.

This chapter also introduced the Schlossberg's Theory of Transition that is used as the guiding framework in this study. Schlossberg's Theory of Transition consists of four main components, known as the Four S's, are: (1) situation, (2) self, (3) social support, and (4) strategies (Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015; Stokes et al., 2018). This theory was used to explore the situation, self, social support, and strategies that combat veterans who are diagnosed with service-linked PTSD encounter when seeking and maintaining employment. Research questions pertinent to the study were also identified. A qualitative explanatory case study design was used for this study. This chapter also discussed the assumptions, and delimitations, and limitations of the study. Understanding how assumptions, delimitations, and limitations affect the study is important to the usefulness of this study to future research studies. As this chapter concludes and transitions to the review of the current literature, it is imperative to understand the participants of the study, current research that is similar or related to the topic to be explored, and how the application of the theoretical framework sets the foundation of the research being conducted. Lastly, Chapter 1 provided the readers a thorough review of all the aspects involved in the study. The literature review in Chapter 2 provided an insight on the current research on the population of interest and the theoretical framework being explored.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

This qualitative study explored the employment programs designed to assist male combat veterans with service-linked PTSD in finding and maintaining employment. The objective of this study was to better understand the specific ways in which these employment programs assist combat veterans with service-linked PTSD in finding work as well as provide them with skills and other resources to remain employed after they become employed. The study participants for this study were veterans who are diagnosed with service-linked PTSD and have utilize non-clinical employment programs to find and retain employment.

This chapter begins with the theoretical framework of Schlossberg's (1981) Theory of Transition. Schlossberg's Theory of Transition provides the foundation on which this study is based. Furthermore, this chapter consisted of a synopsis of research studies that have formed and established operations concerning Schlossberg's Theory of Transition and the validity of how and when employment programs that support veterans with service-linked PTSD can or should be utilized for employability. Next, a review of the literature of several studies related to the obstacles that veterans with service-linked PTSD face after leaving the military as they transition into the civilian workplace post military service, workforce employment programs and their support of veterans with service-linked PTSD, veterans' employment experiences and perceptions of the transition process into the civilian workforce, and the support provided to veterans with the necessary resources as they face obstacles in finding and maintaining employment are presented. Also included in this chapter were studies that mirror the use of Schlossberg's

Theory of Transition that workforce support programs may consider and utilize as part of its objectives and help veterans as they transition into the civilian workplace. Finally, this chapter summarized the gaps in the literature and discussed how the literature review was conducted.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The literature review was conducted using several different library databases including, Supplemental Index, Directory of Open Access Journals, Social Sciences Citation Index, Academic Search Complete, MEDLINE with Full Text PubMed, PsychiatryOnline, PsycARTICLES, CINAHL Plus with Full Text, PubMed, Education Source, Social Sciences Citation Index, PsycBOOKS, PsychiatryOnline, ScienceDirect, ERIC, and Journals@OVID. Keywords included “Schlossberg’s Theory of Transition,” “veterans,” and “PTSD.” Additional search terms included “career transition,” “employment,” “transition,” “life satisfaction,” “military veterans,” “Veteran’s Affairs,” “OIF/OEF,” “veteran transition,” “vocational programs,” “work life,” “competitive employment,” “mental illness,” “TBI,” “veteran brain injury,” “supported employment,” “work experience,” “vocational rehabilitation,” “employment programs,” “Theory of Transition,” “VA,” “post 9/11,” “deployment transition,” “careers,” “workplace,” “military,” “vocational programs,” “jobs,” “mental health issues,” “military service,” “civilian workplace,” “displaces veterans,” and “jobs for veterans.” All articles were published in English that specifically referenced the key words, search terms, and related theories of this study in the last five years to the present were included in the study.

## Conceptual Framework

Schlossberg's (1981) Theory of Transition was used to direct this study. The Theory of Transition explains the transitions that a person's experience as they move from one state or condition to another and the ways they cope with incorporating the event into their life (Evans et al., 1998). According to Schlossberg's Theory of Transition, the change from one experience or non-event results in transformed relationships, habits, expectations, and roles (Schlossberg et al., 1995). This theory consists of four main components known as the Four Ss. They are (1) situation, (2) self, (3) social support, and (4) strategies (Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015; Stokes et al., 2018). The first 'S,' the situation, takes into consideration everything involved in the transition situation (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2010). For example, what triggered the transition? Is the person experiencing the transition in control or out of control in the situation? Is it permanent, such as the inability to work? What stress is present? Are there other stressors occurring at the same time? The second 'S,' the self, looks at the personal characteristics of how the individual perceive their life and the transition (Reppert et al., 2014). According to Schlossberg et al. (1995), personal and demographic characteristics such as gender, socioeconomic status, stage of life, state of health, ethnicity, and age affect how a person transition. The third 'S' is support (Reppert et al., 2014). Social support is often viewed as a significant part to the management of the transition of veterans with service-linked PTSD (Drebig et al., 2018). Veterans with service-linked PTSD need a lot of support. The support can include immediate family, friends, or VA support with the use of non-clinical services. For this study, the focus was on employment programs. The fourth 'S,' strategies, refers to the ways that individuals

cope with a transition (Reppert et al., 2014). Coping responses include those that modify the situation, those that control the meaning of the problem, and those that aid in managing of stress.

Schlossberg's (1981) four 'S' components include individual and psychosomatic influences that dictate how change can have control on the outcome of one's situation whether it was foreseen or unexpected (Greer, 2017). Whether or not combat veterans who are diagnosed with service-linked PTSD anticipated this transition in life, the idea that these changes in life put emphasis on the probability of overcoming one's previous shortcoming speaks volumes on the idea over success after deployment in finding and maintains employment. Schlossberg's (1981) Theory of Transition was used to explore the situation, self, social support, and strategies that combat veterans with service-linked PTSD encounter when seeking and maintaining employment. The social support component of the transition theory was used to explore how veterans' support system will either positively or negatively affect their transition to civilian employment. For the purpose of this study, employment programs were the support system that was explored. The strategy component was used to explore how the support combat veterans with service-linked PTSD received from the employment program help them cope with their employment situation after participating in an employment program.

### **Theoretical Framework and its Recent Uses**

It is important to understand how the Schlossberg Theory of Transition was utilized and applied in this study. There are few studies that have used Schlossberg's Theory of Transition in understanding how veterans with service-linked PTSD transition from the military into the civilian workforce; however, several studies exist in their

applications to transitioning into furthering one's education from military service. For example, Reppert et al. (2014) applied Schlossberg's Theory of Transition as the theoretical framework for understanding how female veterans are supported as they transition into the development of their careers and the obstacles that female veterans faced in their career development. Reppert et al.'s (2014) study provided an outline of evidence relevant to the uniqueness of female veterans as well as the transitions and experiences specific to this population in career development. The author noted that female veterans face a higher rate of unemployment and underemployment compared to their male veterans as they transition from the military to the civilian workforce.

Several examples that exist are that of the usefulness of Schlossberg's (1981) Theory of Transition, which was utilized in the theoretical framework in exploring veteran's transition to pursuing a college degree. A study by Tollerson (2018) involved Schlossberg's Theory of Transition as a methodical framework for understanding how the challenges faced by African American female veterans have generated and challenged various post-service transitioning efforts. This study explored how female veterans created significance in their civilian lives as they overcame transitional challenges and coped with changes regarding the transition to institution of higher education. Another study conducted by Griffin and Gilbert (2015) utilized Schlossberg's (1981) Theory of Transition to explain veterans' transition into education. Griffin and Filbert (2015) utilized the Schlossberg's (1981) Theory of Transition to build upon a qualitative analysis of accounts from veterans, officials, and scholar's relationships professionals to investigate if and how organizations can affect veterans' transitions to advanced education. A different study conducted by Pellegrino and Hoggan (2015) explored how

veterans transition after military service into the field of higher education. These studies conducted explored the transition into education, learning, and schooling, but studies rarely exist regarding the transition of veterans or combat veterans with service-linked PTSD into the workplace, or that explores how vocational programs can help the transition of these veterans into the civilian workplace.

### **Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts**

The purpose of this literature review was to provide the reader with a general overview of the current research regarding the employability of combat veterans with service-linked PTSD and their employability. Currently, there is a paucity of research that explores the lived experience of veterans with service-linked PTSD as they transition into the civilian workplace in the non-clinical aspect. The first part of this chapter provides detailed information describing the research that involves veterans in employment programs, veterans' employment experiences, veterans' career transition, and workplace support.

**Veterans in employment programs.** Veterans generally have a difficult time finding and maintaining work post-military service (Hammer, Wan, Brockwood, Bodner, & Mohr, 2019). Finding resources that are supportive of veterans as they transition into the workplace is essential to their workforce transition. Wyse et al. (2018) conducted a study that presented evidence that combat veterans with mental health issues have a significantly more challenging time transitioning into the civilian workforce. The study investigated veterans' experiences in participating and maintaining participation in employment programs with the use of interviews in order to explore how service-linked mental health played a significant role as an obstacle to one's vocational program

participation. Wyse et al. (2018) sought out additional obstacles that perceived of combat veterans with mental health challenges by sharing individual experiences and feelings pertaining to the transition to civilian employment and participation in vocational programs for veterans who were affected by Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) or other post-deployment mental health issues. Wyse et al.'s (2018) study consisted of five focus groups and 10 individual interviews with a total of 37 veterans. The study participants involved veterans with a past of deployment linked TBI or other mental health-associated issues. Participants were interviewed individually or in a group setting. Study findings indicated that these individuals with TBI or other serious mental issues were more likely to have problems accessing vocational programs. Further, results from Wyse et al.'s (2018) study confirmed that veterans with TBI or other mental health issues faced numerous internal and external factors that may impede their successful transition post deployment into the civilian workforce. The authors concluded that additional support from the Department of Veteran Affairs and veteran supported vocational programs are needed in order to meet the needs of this veteran population as more and more veterans were being diagnosed with service-linked TBI or other service-linked mental health issues. The understanding of how workforce programs can help support veterans in their transition to the civilian workforce is essential to successful veteran employability.

Support programs for veterans can be complex but can be helpful in improving the employability of veterans with service-linked PTSD or other mental health-related service-linked disabilities. Stacy, Stefanovics, and Rosenheck (2017) noted that Individual Placement and Support (IPS) for individuals with mental health disabilities improved competitive employment rates. Stacy et al. (2017) conducted an investigation

of data from a quasi-experimental example that examined the relationship of numerous causes for lack of employment with the interval of the first IPS occupation. This study examined the correlation of job length and causes for job loss with consequent employment. Veterans' generally identified cause for termination was due to drug or alcohol usage; mental and/or physical health complications were rarely named as reason for termination (Stacy, 2017) Results from this study revealed veterans' identified drug or alcohol use as well as mental and/or physical health issues as significant reasons for the loss of employment. Stacy et al. (2017) added that these analyses revealed distinct employment related obstacles amongst displaced IPS participants. This study found that displaced veterans, especially those who suffered from mental health disabilities and alcohol or drug use, needed better vocational support resources and services to gain and maintain employment. Appropriate vocational support services and resources are crucial for veterans especially veterans whom are displaced due to service-linked issues.

Veterans with service-linked PTSD who abuse drugs or alcohol often times find themselves in trouble with the law, making the reintegration into the civilian life and work life even more complicated. LePage et al. (2018) conducted a study that compared three different vocational reintegration modalities for a veteran population of 111 veterans with a history of at least one felony conviction and a mental illness and/or substance use disorder recruited from a VA medical center. LePage et al. (2018) noted that the study correspondingly compared three different vocational reintegration modalities for the veteran population. Participants in this study were assigned to one of the three conditions and monitored for 12 months. Results from this study indicated that new employment for veterans throughout the last six months of the follow-up period was



moderately low. Data from this study supported the use of employment reintegration programs. These programs can help veterans with a smoother transition into their desired field of employment with the appropriate support and services.

Veterans of color face many challenges when wishing to transition from the military to the civilian workplace. Many of these challenges are complex in nature especially when it involves mental health obstacles and services that are not available in a timely manner. Johnson et al. (2017) conducted a national study involving veterans of color with mental health issues associated with combat deployment. The purpose of Johnson et al.'s (2017) study was to facilitate better-quality outcomes for veterans of color as these individuals transitioned to the civilian workplace post-deployment with the use of vocational services and collaborative veteran co-programs. Johnson et al. (2017) utilized several surveys in order to analyze and identify potential newer vocational programs or services that can develop and identify a new theoretical concept for a new State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (SVRA). The sample consisted of approximately 80 veterans of color with mental health issues. Data were collected with the use of online survey forums. Results from this study showed that integrated vocational programs and other co-services, specifically for veterans with a service-linked mental health issue post-deployment connected with their service can contribute to the effective and successful transition to the civilian workplace, but they were not steady among all agencies and other vocational programs. Johnson et al.'s (2017) study concluded that co-services and external programs could lead to better employment outcomes for veterans of color with service-linked disabilities and could provide an innovative framework used in the assessment of a new model or theoretical framework that contributes to evidenced-based

performances that could be used in the operationalization practices. Oftentimes, the expectations of services offered to veterans, especially veterans of color, face more challenges and scrutiny making it difficult for the transition to be operational and successful in its efforts to an already delicate population.

Service-linked mental health issues are already a complicated issue for veterans, especially for veterans seeking vocational support programs as they transition from the military. Kukla, McGuire, and Salyers (2016) conducted a mixed methods study that compared urban and rural-supported vocational programs on obstacles and support services for the employment for veterans suffering from service-linked mental health issues. The purpose of this study was to explore vocational programs that supported veterans with mental health issues associated with their service in the military. This mixed methods study included 114 participants and comprised of supported employment staff, supervisors, and upper-level managers hired by the Veteran's Health Administration. Participants in this study completed an online survey that was composed of open-ended questions. Findings revealed that participants faced several factors that impacted the employment success of veterans with mental health issues. Furthermore, Kukla et al. (2016) reported that the findings suggested that supported employment participants from rural programs faced significantly more obstacles related to employment compared with urban participants, specifically pertaining to employment resources and services. In contrast, participants from urban programs described better support in the area of mental health services. Exploring how both urban and rural programs experienced distinctive obstacles related to where participants are located and how the factor of transportation affected their employment outcomes highlights where

challenges should be further explored in order to provide proper supported employment programs for veterans with service-linked mental health issues. Employment programs that can offer appropriate vocational services and programs to veterans with mental health issues are vital to their future employability as veteran's transition from the military.

It is not uncommon for combat veterans to become diagnosed with a service-linked disability post leaving a war zone. Wyse et al. (2018) conducted a study that involved Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans with service-linked polytrauma/traumatic brain injury. The study utilized qualitative interviews and focus groups with veterans with documented service-linked polytrauma/TBI history. The purpose of the study was to explore veterans' perceived obstacles to gaining and maintaining employment and vocational reintegration program participation. Wyse et al. (2018) indicated that the study was also used to explore thoughts regarding interest in an evidence-based vocational rehabilitation program supported employment programs for veterans with service-linked PTSD, mental health issues or TBI. Study findings identified several factors that were associated with the significant obstacles faced by war veterans with finding and maintaining employment due to their service-linked polytrauma/TBI symptoms. Understanding how these factors discovered in this study can help veterans with mental health issues associated with their military service is essential to helping veterans as they transition from their military careers to civilian employment.

**Veteran's employment experience.** The transition back to civilian life is one of the most difficult challenges veterans face (Rice & Lui, 2016). Eisen et al. (2015) conducted a national study that involved veterans that were hired by the VA as peer and

vocational experts. The main purpose of this study was to observe and examine occupational experiences, mental health, and quality of life between veterans employed as peer or Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) specialists by the VA with comparable lived experience of mental illness, substance abuse, and homelessness. This observational study conducted across 49 states consisted of 374 participants involving 138 VA health care systems. Results from this study revealed that the peer specialists involved in this particular study were more likely than VR specialists to share their recovery experiences and serve as an advocate for veterans in vocational settings. In addition, this study also found that peer veterans support can serve as an important moderating role to other veterans with similar characteristics comparable of the study participants in supervisory roles and the association with the successful transition from the military to the civilian world of these veterans internally and externally of the VA. Eisen et al. (2015) concluded that emphasizing the significance of employment and peer veteran supervision is essential in understanding and recognizing how both the implementation of post-deployment workplace transition and recovery focused services and the promotion of mental health in a community of veterans serving each other is essential to positive outcomes for this population of veterans.

Kukla, Rattray, and Salyers (2015) conducted a mixed methods study examining work reintegration experiences from the viewpoints of veterans with service-linked mental health issues. The purpose of the study was to understand the difficulty that veterans with service-linked mental health issues are faced with as they try to transition from the military into the civilian world. Kukla et al. (2015) further explained that this study was conducted to address this gap in knowledge and also examined work

reintegration of veterans with mental health issues receiving care from the VA.

Participants in this study included 40 veterans. Veterans were rated due to the effect of a variety of elements and their employment success. Study participants also provided narratives on their most and least gainful employment experiences. Kukla et al. (2015) used t-tests and qualitative analysis to associate participants who served in combat amongst those who did not serve in combat. Kukla et al. (2015) concluded that veterans with mental health issues who served in war-related combat experienced more difficulty being reintegrated into civilian employment than their peer veterans who did not serve in war-related combat. Understanding how veterans perceive themselves is crucial to their future employment outcomes and can also dictate how others in society may perceive their employability in the civilian workforce.

It is not uncommon for military veterans to want to transition into the civilian government agencies that support military missions. Troutman and Gagnon (2014) reviewed the experiences of a group of Navy veterans with the desire to pursue civilian careers with the Department of Defense (DOD). The authors explored what happened when these group members received professional assistance. The study involved a group of 41 veterans with the desire to transition into a civilian DOD career. Troutman and Gagnon (2014) conducted nine two-hour face-to-face group training sessions on how to conduct federal employee job search using USAJOBS government website. After the sessions, webinar-based trainings were offered to cover additional professionalization and job search topics. According to Troutman and Gagnon (2014), this included converting military work history into civilian work history qualifications and skills, creating cover letters, and effective interviewing techniques. Additionally, the participants received five

hours of individualized research, writing, and coaching support for the resume and job search (Troutman & Gagnon, 2014). After a series of further career-advancement seminars and related assessments, participants were assigned to professional writers/coaches who piloted an individualized job market analysis and in-depth interviews designed to analyze qualifications, skills, experience, training, and education (Troutman & Gagnon, 2014). Study findings revealed that professional vocational assistance positively impacted the job search results of its participants. Results from this study identified that of the twenty-six participants, eleven were employed into worthy competitive career positions that included salaries and benefits, ten received interviews or employment proposals that were rejected, four made the decision to remain in the military, and one decided to pursue an education. These findings indicated that the study was limited due to the author's experiences with this group of participants, and they insisted on future research to include all branches of the military in order to make substantial claims on the validity of their claims. However, Troutman and Gagnon (2014) revealed that data collected in this study encouraged further examination regarding the utilization of appropriate methods in order to keep veterans out of unemployment lines and positions of underemployment as they transition from the military into the civilian workforce. Applying the correct approaches to veterans in transition is important for maintaining the employability status of veterans.

**Workplace support.** Veterans with service-linked PTSD often face the difficult challenge of finding and maintaining competitive employment (Groah et al., 2017). Sometimes these challenges are beyond their control and are associated with their service-linked mental health status (MacGregor & Heileman, 2017). Walter, Jak, and

Twamley (2015) conducted a one-year study that investigated how service-linked PTSD influenced the overall trajectory of veterans with a TBI or other mental health issues who wanted to return to the workforce post-deployment. The purpose of the Walter et al. (2015) study was to determine if the severity of veterans' PTSD symptoms supported the need for veterans to have better support. In addition, the study highlighted the need for determining the best treatment options for Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) veterans with TBI or other mental health associated issues. This study included 50 OEF/OIF veterans with a diagnosis of TBI or other service-linked mental health issues with the objective of transitioning into the workforce (Walter et al., 2015). Participants of this study were recruited from several VA clinics from the San Diego, California area and were supported by two vocational specialists that provided services during this study (Walter et al., 2015).

In addition, Walter et al. (2015) noted that of these participants these vocational specialists provided supported employment; "one provided CogSMART for one 60-minute visitation per week in addition to one 60-min supported employment visitation and the other provided ESE for two 60-min visitation per week (extra visitation consisted of SE were included to match therapist time)" (p. 304). Findings from this study demonstrated that there is a significant correlation between PTSD and SE, and that post-service linked mental health symptoms are not only due to symptom overlap, but a more wide-ranging association occurs between these theories (Walter et al. 2015). Symptoms of mental health disabilities are complex and not necessarily straightforward to comprehend. Veterans with service-linked mental health issues need better support, especially in the workplace. This study would also help reiterate that there is a need to

help veterans received the necessary support in managing the severity of their service-linked PTSD symptoms in order to be able to seek stable employment while managing their service-linked PTSD in a vocational setting.

Abraham, Yosef, Resnick, and Zivin (2017) conducted a study that examined if veterans with mental health issues receiving specific types of employment services between the years 2006 and 2010 gained modest employment. The study included 38,199 veterans in its sample and included two variables. The sample size comprised of veterans who had participated in supported employment programs and those that did not have any supported participation in an employment program. Results indicated that veterans who received supported employment program services were more likely to be modestly employed, and veterans who did not receive any employment services were less likely to be gainfully employed. Abraham et al. (2017) noted that during the years of one of the biggest economic recession between 2007 and 2009, the probability of gaining modest employment was significantly lower than that of subsequent years. Furthermore, this study concluded that the probability of gaining modest employment was uncertain although many types of vocational services for veterans with mental health issues compared with services based in a medical center. These findings further imply that more research is needed to examine the effects of non-clinical military service-linked PTSD programs to support veteran employability.

Stone, Lengnick-Hall, and Muldoon (2018) conducted a study regarding how stereotypes of veterans affect employment opportunities. The purpose of this study was to determine how hiring managers observed candidates who have U.S. military job experience and how these views of veterans affect evaluations of perceived employment.



Stone et al. (2018) used an experimental design in which participants in this study reviewed a job description and evaluated a variety of resumes on those who potentially fit the employment position. Results from this study indicated that veterans are often stereotyped based on their military affiliation and these perceptions significantly influenced how whether veterans were deemed to be fit for employment. Stone et al. (2018) stressed that this study provided suggestions for employing managers by signifying the biases faced by veterans when applying for employment. This study provided significant data regarding the obstacles that veterans face when applying for civilian employment, and that these obstacles contributed significantly to the unemployment rates of veteran.

Gao, Dolce, Rio, Heitzmann, and Loving (2016) examined the effects of descriptions in the support for goal-oriented, time-limited *in vivo* coaching/training tactics for skills and abilities building between peer veteran employment reintegration experts of the Homeless Veteran Supported Employment Program (HVSEP). The purpose of this study was to support veterans in their goal transitioning into gainful civilian employment. Gao et al. (2016) explained that study results were intended to significantly increase the resources, skills, abilities, and services of veteran providers that mutually increase rates of employment and salaries of the displaced veterans utilizing these services. Gao et al. (2016) implied that training peers using an *in vivo* training method provided an exceptional opportunity for the veterans to significantly increase their job development skills and abilities with an emphasis to maintain employment results for the facility users. Veterans as well as their providers should have the

appropriate applications for veterans seeking employment as they transition from their military service.

In a related study, Kukla et al. (2015) conducted a mixed-methods piloted study that investigated factors impacting the employment success of veterans with mental health disorders. The purpose of their study was to understand and define veteran perspectives of influences that impacted their employment success. This particular study included 40 employed and unemployed veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or other severe mental issues. Study participants completed a survey of factors that impacted employment functioning and included narrative details of their successful and difficult employment experiences. Results from this study indicated that several factors were rated as being the most impactful on their employment. For example, economic factors, veteran specific issues, and job fit, just to name a few (Kukla et al., 2015). Additionally, Kukla et al. (2015) added that there were no significant differences on ratings of employment factors based on employment status. Narrative details validated the survey results and identified additional factors that impacted the employment success of veterans with mental health disorders. This study concluded that several factors significantly impact the employment success of veterans with mental disorders. Exploring how to help veterans with mental disorders is imperative to understanding the effects that non-clinical employment programs have on the employability of veterans.

**Veterans' career transition.** Veterans face the demanding challenge of transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce (Griffin & Stein, 2015). According to Zalaquett and Chatters (2016), this transition for veterans with service-

linked PTSD or other mental health-related service-linked issues is not easy and comes with many obstacles for veterans. Culp (2014) emphasized the importance of research on veterans' experiences as they transition as an important aspect in understanding the complexity of this life changing time. Robertson, Miles, and Mallen (2014) conducted a review of the literature from the years 2000 to 2013 on career transition and military concerns of veterans. This review of the literature consisted of a subcommittee of four participants that conducted a literature search, collected important information from their search, and acquired input from the group (Robertson et al. 2014). The purpose of this literature review was to explore the military career transition literature. Robertson et al. (2014) insisted that by compiling literature review of military career transition, researchers and practitioners would be able to identify the gaps in the current literature and then conduct additional research studies by making a way for newer research and publications concerning the military career transition of veterans. This study was able to identify the significant gaps in the literature pertaining to veterans as they transition from the military into the civilian workplace. The study identified the need for more research on female veterans as they transition into the workforce because of the lack of articles addressing this population of veterans. Robertson et al. (2014) concluded that there is a need for further research to address the current gaps in the literature regarding the career transition literature as it concerns and affects military members and veterans. Understanding how female and male veterans are affected while transitioning into the civilian workforce is crucial to addressing the issues affecting the veteran population as a whole.

Many veterans often confront biases transitioning from their military to civilian life. These biases can dictate how an individual's transition experience is perceived. This transitional experience can be positive or negative depending on the individual's biases. Senecal, McDonald, LaFleur, and Coey (2019) conducted a study to determine how significant personal relationships and other factors are crucial to the well-being and work-life satisfaction of veterans as they transition from the military into civilian employment. The study consisted of 220 veterans. Participants completed self-report surveys related to their transition from the military to a civilian career. Participants reported a significant emotional and motivational aspect to the formation of negative biases triggered by the transition from the military to the civilian workforce (Senecal et al., 2019). Furthermore, Senecal et al. (2019) found that veterans without proper support were more likely to have lower life satisfaction and lower civilian cohesion for fellow veterans as they transitioned into their civilian lives post-military service.

Veteran's experiences while transitioning into the civilian world sets the tone for how they perceive this new life transition from their military service. Senecal (2018) conducted a study to understand the struggles that veterans transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce faced in their time with the military and post-military service. Twenty-five veterans were interviewed for the study. In the interviews, the veterans described their experiences of the transition from military life to the civilian workforce. Findings from this study revealed that there was a significant social aspect to the difficulties faced once separating from their military service into their civilian life. Findings of the study showed that the loss of unity and a seemingly sense of dependence amongst their civilian peers was a significant reasoning for the hurdles these participants'

face in their civilian life transition (Senecal, 2018). Veterans need a sense of belongingness and appropriate amount of support from family, friends, military peers, and their respective places of employment in order to be satisfied with their new life transition. Understanding the many barriers that veteran face as they transition from the military is crucial to future veteran employment services and opportunities of employment in their lives.

Bennett et al. (2015) examined variables pertinent to transition to civilian pharmacy career path for retiring military pharmacists. A cross-sectional survey was used to collect data from 140 retired military pharmacists. The study categorized demographic information to identify how these variables impacted the transition from a military pharmacist career to a civilian pharmacist career. The survey included supplementary items inquiring about their insights of their military experience, transition to civilian work, and the influence the military career had on their individual and personal life. Results from this study revealed several factors to be significant predictors of the transition to civilian career from the military. Some factors were relationship status while in the military, length of time to retirement, access to military resources and veteran benefits and administration of current job to name a few (Bennett et al., 2015). Bennett et al.'s (2015) study results yielded findings that suggested that a large portion of participants perceived that the transition to civilian employment was approximately what they had anticipated.

Life post-military service can be difficult to navigate for veterans (Kimbrel et al., 2015). However, Arendt and Sapp (2014) explained that many military individuals are seeking employment in fields that one may not have considered, but oftentimes these

individuals face several challenges when it comes to converting their military experience into civilian work experience. For example, Chuprinski (2019) reported that even though veterans have significant experience in fields such as health care, administration, teaching, and operating heavy equipment, veterans often have to retrain since their experience may not be recognized formally in the civilian workplace. Robertson and Brott (2014) conducted a study that included military veterans who transitioned to education career positions. The program was called Troops to Teachers (TTT). In this study the sample consisted of 136 participants, with 90 members and 46 mentors. Results from this study identified that descriptive statistics were used to examine the participants and a multiple regression analysis was used to determine if the changing variables dictated the variation regarding work life satisfaction. This study found that confidence and control demonstrated a significant association with life satisfaction (Robertson & Brott, 2014). Having a satisfying career is important for veterans especially during the transition process to the civilian workforce. Robertson and Brott (2014) further recommended that future research on how veterans face the difficult challenge of transitioning into civilian employment be explored to gain a broader understanding of other variables that could potentially demonstrate a correlation of how employment affects life satisfaction of veterans' post-military service.

Perceptions of veterans with disabilities can dictate how this population is viewed in the civilian workplace (Thorne et al., 2017). Understanding how veterans with disabilities are perceived is significant to their vocational development especially during the transition to the workplace. Stern (2017) conducted an exploratory literature review that explored how veterans with service-linked disabilities post-9/11 transitioned into the

civilian workplace were observed in human resource development literature. The purpose of this study was to establish the experiences of veterans with service-linked PTSD. Stern (2017) searched extensively through scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles in order to conduct research exploring how this population of veterans is presented in the literature. Results from this exploratory literature review identified the perception of how post-9/11 veterans and these veterans' post-deployment transition into the civilian workplace. In addition, the common theme of these articles focused on how this population of veterans with service-linked disabilities are portrayed and viewed in American society. Post-9/11 veterans with associated post-service linked disabilities faced many obstacles as they transition into civilian work life. Stern (2017) noted that bringing awareness to the struggles of this population of post-9/11 veterans could potentially create a sense of hope and empowerment for all veterans and other veteran peers with service-linked disabilities who are struggling with the transition to civilian work life post deployment.

The transition from the military to the civilian workplace is challenging but can be navigated in order to seek a positive employment outcome. Anderson and Goodman (2014) discussed in the article entitled "From Military to Civilian Life: Applications of Schlossberg's Model for Veterans in Transition" the significance of assisting veterans as they transition from military to civilian life, utilizing the framework of Schlossberg's 4-S Transition Model. Furthermore, the application of Schlossberg's 4-S Transition Model utilized by Anderson and Goodman (2014) discussed the analysis and intervention across the following 4 Ss: (1) situation, (2) self, (3) support, and (4) strategies. This article focused on applications of Schlossberg's 4-S Transition Model for employed veterans as

they transitioned from the military to civilian life. Included in this article were four different cases that provided descriptive examples of the obstacles that veterans might come across while struggling to manage and to navigate effectively through the transition from the military to the civilian workplace as it affects several aspects of their lives. For example, a case study included in this article, expressed the importance of providing operational examples of utilizing the Schlossberg model for conceptualizing and tailoring treatment for veteran clients that transitioned from military to civilian life (Anderson & Goodman, 2014). A comprehensive study conducted at the Pew Research Center that involved 1,853 veterans demonstrated the pros and cons of military life transfer when transitioning to civilian life, with re-entry particularly difficult for combat veterans (as cited in Anderson & Goodman, 2014). Results from this study indicated that a little over half of this veteran population had a difficult time transitioning post-9/11 into the civilian workforce. Furthermore, Anderson and Goodman (2014) stressed the importance of being informed of the many barriers that this population of veterans experience as they transitioned into the civilian workplace post-9/11.

Understanding the employment needs of veterans is important to the employability. Sripada et al. (2018) conducted a study that assessed employment statuses and support needs in veterans that were diagnosed with service-linked PTSD. They surveyed 287 veterans that completed questionnaires online that assessed employment status, PTSD symptoms, employment support preferences, and obstacles to service usage. Results from this study indicated that veterans with service-linked PTSD were less likely to be gainfully employed than were veterans without service-linked PTSD. Findings revealed that veterans with service-linked PTSD transitioning into the civilian workforce



needed a more effective vocational support system that can adequately accommodate their complex needs. Veterans with service-linked PTSD should have access to vocational support in non-clinical employment programs in order gain and maintain employment in the civilian workforce. Very little research exists currently on the effects of non-clinical military PTSD programs to support veteran employability. Outcomes from this study highlight how veterans with service-linked PTSD was able to receive the services needed in getting the appropriate vocational support programs as essential to their future employability in the civilian workforce.

Vogt et al. (2017) conducted a study on the life of post-9/11 of male and female veterans with service-linked PTSD and their work life transition and family life related outcomes. This study was longitudinal and included a sample of 524 post-9/11 veterans who completed mailed surveys. Vogt et al. (2017) found that post-9/11 veterans reported significantly high work and family quality of life but anticipated lower effective work life and family satisfaction for both male and female participants. Study findings suggested that interventions can help the reintegration of veterans with service-linked PTSD as they transition from the military back into their civilian lives and civilian employment. Furthermore, results from this study can help alleviate the adverse effects associated with veterans with service-linked PTSD and other service-linked mental health disorders as it relates to the quality of work and family life. Vogt et al. (2017) added that the study's findings significantly contributed to research signifying that mutually exclusive relationships and variances of the post-military life transition of male and female post-9/11 veterans with service-linked PTSD and emphasized the necessity for additional research of the unique employment obstacles that female veterans experienced post

military service. The Vogt et al.'s (2017) research study further demonstrates the need for future research to focus on exploring the successfulness of non-clinical employment programs and services for veterans with service-linked PTSD. An employment service that focuses on the rehabilitation of veterans with mental health issues due to service in the military is crucial to work life outcomes for this population of individuals. O'Connor et al. (2016) evaluated 18 veterans with PTSD or other mental health disabilities over a twelve-week period that focused on the cognitive reintegration intervention embedded within employment rehabilitation services. Results from this pilot viability study established successful application of a fixed cognitive reintegration intervention within employment rehabilitation for veterans. O'Connor et al. (2016) stated that this study revealed insignificant to a modest influence on employment outcomes. Employment outcomes are directly related to the proper reintegration of veterans with a service-linked mental health issue. These data suggested that future research should be conducted in order better understand this population of veterans who are affected by the transition to civilian employment.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The goal of the proposed study was to determine the effects of participation in employment programs on the employability of combat veterans with service-linked PTSD. Understanding how and why veterans with service-linked PTSD are faced with a variety of obstacles when it comes to transitioning from the military to civilian employment is a complex issue. Most studies reviewed in the literature suggested that veterans with service-linked PTSD or other mental health issues face one of the most difficult times while transitioning from the military into the civilian workplace (Culp,

2014; Griffin & Stein, 2015; Zalaquett & Chatters, 2016). Workplace support programs, also referred to as vocational programs or employment programs are important resources and services that veterans with service-linked PTSD can utilize in order to seek the necessary help in finding and maintaining competitive employment (Wyse et al. 2018). Studies on veterans' experiences as they transition into the workforce post-military service demonstrated that this population has faced several obstacles related to their mental health (Kukla et al., 2015; Troutman & Gagnon, 2014). These experiences also indicated that veteran's experiences while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce can dictate the work-life satisfaction (Senecal et al., 2019). Veterans with service-linked PTSD or other service-linked mental health disabilities demonstrate a significant need for support from their workplace and other resources in managing their service-linked PTSD or mental health issues while working with the civilian workforce (MacGregor & Heileman, 2017). This support is significantly important for their success in managing their mental health issues or service-linked PTSD while seeking employment or maintaining employment (Abraham et al., 2017). Thus, an important aspect of this study is the application of the Schlossberg Theory of Transition, which is appropriate to utilize for this challenging population. Several studies looked at veterans from the transition of military to education, but few have explored how the effects of participating in employment programs helps increase the employability of combat veterans with service-linked PTSD find and maintain competitive employment (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Reisman, 2016; Robertson & Brott, 2014). Additionally, an important aspect to this study provided a better understanding to the specific ways in which these vocational programs assist combat veterans with service-linked PTSD in finding and

maintaining work, as well as providing them with skills and other resources needed in order to remain employed after finding employment.

The gap in the literature regarding the effects of participation of veterans with service-linked PTSD in employment programs was relatively large. There is little to no research that exists on the topic proposed in this study. Research that currently exists focused on the clinical aspects of veterans with service-linked PTSD and their participation in employment programs, whereas this study focused on non-clinical employment programs for veterans with service-linked PTSD. Another gap that was considered is the relatively small sample size of the population being studied; therefore, study findings cannot be generalized to the entire veteran population. In addition to the small sample size, the participant inclusion criteria also limited the number of individuals who were able to participate in the proposed study. Therefore, this study cannot be generalized to the entire population of its participants as a whole. This study sought to understand the significant experiences of veterans with service-linked PTSD and their participation in employment programs in order to gain and maintain employment. In conclusion, the proposed study focused on the particular approaches in which these employment programs successfully assist combat veterans with service-linked PTSD in finding work in addition to providing them with appropriate skills, abilities, and other resources in order to remain employed after they become gainfully employed. The purpose of this study explored the different aspects that veterans with service-linked PTSD faced with while participating in employment programs or receiving services from these employment programs. It is clear that the research reviewed in relation to veteran's employment experiences, workplace support, and veteran career transition continues to

be a significant area of interest and requires further research. This study would greatly benefit the population of veterans with a service-linked PTSD or mental health issues transitioning into the civilian workforce.

In the next chapter, the nature and design of study is discussed in detail. Chapter 3 also outlined the specific research questions, briefly expanded on the Schlossberg's Theory of Transition and its application to the proposed research study, and described the development of the data collection procedures. These were all significant aspects to understanding how this proposed study was conducted in order to better understand the lived experience of participation in employment programs by veterans with service-linked PTSD.

## Chapter 3: Research Methods

### **Introduction to Research Methodology**

This chapter presents the research approach used to explore the lived experience of veterans with service-linked PTSD who have utilized non-clinical employment programs. Chapter 3 presents the research approach and design and presents the rationale for the approach and design and the role of the researcher. The chapter also presented the participant selection logic, instrumentation and the recruitment strategy, target population, data collection methods, and data analysis. Finally, confidentiality and all ethical concerns are explored, methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and the ethical procedures

The purpose of this qualitative study explored the lived experience of veterans with service-linked PTSD who have utilized non-clinical employment programs designed to assist combat veterans with service-linked PTSD in finding and maintaining employment. The goal of this study was to better understand the specific ways in which these programs assist combat veterans with service-linked PTSD in finding work as well as providing them with skills and other resources to remain employed after they start working. Participants for this study were male veterans who are diagnosed with service-linked PTSD and have utilized non-clinical employment programs to find and retain successful employment.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

This study employed a qualitative approach. The specific qualitative design that was utilized for this specific study was an explanatory case study design. Qualitative research is the best suitable methodology for this certain study because it is crucial to

gain detailed perspectives and a profound understanding of how employment programs designed at the employability of veterans with service-linked PTSD ensure employability. Qualitative research highlights a more in-depth personal approach and the data can effortlessly be collected in methods mostly suitable for new or understudied empirical contexts where there is moderately little preceding work, as in this case (Bansal et al., 2018).

An explanatory case study design was utilized for this particular study. Yin (2002) says that explanatory cases studies emphasis a phenomenon in the settings of real-life experiences. A case study approach is valued when understanding individual experiences and real-life situations (Chang, 2015). This approach allowed individual experiences and their participation in employment programs to be used to explore their lived experience. The cases to be explored in this study were combat veterans with service-linked PTSD who would have participated or utilized employment programs. Each participant was able to answer the proposed research questions pertaining to the combat veterans with service-linked PTSD who have participated or utilized employment programs post-deployment. Case studies are beneficial in research when behavior cannot be manipulated. Furthermore, case studies typically use a range of evidence from different sources such as documents, artifacts, interviews, and observation, and go beyond the range of sources of evidence that is available in past research (Rowley, 2002). This study utilized interviews for its data collection method. Additionally, case studies are beneficial in unique circumstances, especially if the question “How” or “Why” is being asked about an existing set of events over which the researcher has limited control (Yin, 1994, p. 9).

A quantitative design was not selected for this particular study because it would facilitate exploration of the veterans' lived experience with participating in employment programs or services that ensure that veterans with service-linked PTSD are able to seek and maintain employment in the civilian workforce. A quantitative design usually does not permit for deep discussions associated with an individual's viewpoints and lived experience (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). This study utilized a qualitative approach to explore essential moral principles, convictions, expectations, and lived experience.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher was to conduct semi-structured interviews with the research participants. There were no personal or professional relationships between the researcher and the research participants. There was no conflict of interest regarding the researchers' personal work environment and that of the research participants because the researcher is not employed at any of the institutions of the research participants. The researcher has been trained at Walden University in "Human Research Subjects" and has the ability to maintain objectivity throughout the interviewing process. The role of the researcher was to maintain an open mind during the interviews and ask semi-structured interview questions following probe questions, allowing the research participants to tell their experiences in their own words without feeling like the researcher is misunderstanding what they are saying (Patton, 2015). These "open-ended questions and probes yield in-depth responses about people's experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings, and knowledge" (Patton, 2015, p. 14). This neutrality also supported the research study participants to be more forthcoming in their answers, as the semi-



structured interview guide was approved by the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

### **Methodology**

An explanatory case study design was utilized for this particular study.

Explanatory case studies are generally used to explore and describe phenomena, but can also be utilized in order to explain the correlation of experience and build on theory (Yin, 2002). A case study approach is valued when there is a need to understand individual experiences and real-life situations (Chang, 2015). This approach allowed individual experiences and their participation in employment programs to be used to explore their lived experience. The cases of this study were combat veterans with service-linked PTSD who would have participated or utilized employment programs. Each participant was considered a case. The cases answered the proposed research questions pertaining to the combat veterans with service-linked PTSD who have participated or utilized employment programs post-deployment. Case studies are beneficial in research when behavior cannot be manipulated and usually case studies utilize a range of evidence from different sources, such as documents, artifacts, interviews, and observation, and go past the range of sources of evidence available in past research (Rowley, 2002). Furthermore, case studies are helpful in unique circumstances, especially if the question “How” or “Why” is being asked about a present set of events above which the researcher has restricted regulations (Yin, 1994, p. 9).

### **Participant Selection Logic**

The target population for this study was male combat veterans with service-linked PTSD from the four primary branches of the military. The four main branches of the

United States (U.S.) military are the Air Force, Marine Corps, Navy, and Army. The U.S. Coast Guard was excluded from this study because it is not one of the primary military branches. A non-probability sampling approach was utilized for this study, which is defined as a non-random number of sampling of participants (Guetterman, 2015). The sample size for this explanatory case study was eight male combat veterans with service-linked PTSD. Creswell's (2008) recommendation for sample size in case studies is between 5 and 25 cases, whereas, Yin (2009) suggests that the sample size is not necessarily pertinent considering the nature of the case study approach. Two veterans were recruited from each of the four primary branches of the military to participate in the study. Purposeful snowball sampling was utilized for this research study. Purposive sampling is the strategy of identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are familiar with or have experienced with an occurrence of interest and experience (Palinkas et al., 2015). Snowball sampling is the selection of participants through referrals by previously selected participants or persons who have access to potential participants (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Combat veterans with service-linked PTSD who agreed to participate in the study were asked if they know other veterans who might have an interest in participating in the study.

To be eligible to participate in the proposed study veterans must had met the following inclusion criteria. Veterans must: (1) have served in combat, (2) be clinically diagnosed with service-linked PTSD, (3) have served in one of the four of the primary branches of the U.S. military, (4) be between 25 to 60 years of age, (5) be male, and (6) have participated or at least received some service from an employment program or agency. Participants were recruited using flyers (see Appendix A), which were circulated

on military installations. Recruitment letters (see Appendix C) were also distributed utilizing the above listed recruitment methods.

### **Instrumentation**

Data for this study were collected through interviews with the use of a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix B). In the first sections of the interview guide, the participants answered a range questions related to their age, branch of military service, war experience, and duration of time in combat, employment status, gender, number of years employed or unemployed, and type of employment. In the second section of the semi-structured interview guide, participants were asked to describe their experiences with employment programs or services utilized or participated in, in order to seek and retain successful employment. It is important that the researcher ensured that the participant is comfortable enough, felt as though they are being heard, and that the researcher was listening to the responses. This was important in order to build rapport between the participant and the researcher. The interview guide entailed the researcher setting the stage so that the participants are comfortable with sharing their lived experience. In addition, a free-flowing interview was utilized to achieve responses from participants in this section. The researcher must be able to control facial expressions and should remain neutral regardless of the participant's responses. Field notes were also to be used for making direct observation of the participant's environment or background noise as well as verbal and nonverbal communications if interview is conducted face-to-face. Furthermore, field notes were also be used to capture things that may not be able to be show or explain the trustworthiness or inconsistency of the participant being interviewed.

### **Procedures for Recruitment**

Participants were recruited using flyers that were circulated on American Legion Post in Albany, GA. Social media was also be used to recruit participants for this study. For example, Facebook, a social media platform, was used to recruit potential participants for this study. A status update with the specific participant criteria was listed in order to save time on screening participants that potentially meet the inclusion criteria. Additionally, recruitment letters (see Appendix C) with researcher's contact information were left at the American Legion post in Albany, GA in order to gain potential participants for this study.

### **Target Population**

The target populations for this study were combat veterans with service-linked PTSD from the four primary branches of the military. The four main branches of the United States (U.S.) military are the Air Force, Marine Corps, Navy, and Army. The U.S. Coast Guard was excluded from this study because it is not a primary branch of military. A non-probability sampling approach was utilized for this study, which is defined as a non-random number of sampling of participants (Guetterman, 2015). The sample size for this explanatory case study were eight combat veterans with service-linked PTSD, with two veterans being recruited from each of the four primary branches of the military to participate in the study. Purposive snowball sampling was utilized for this research study. Purposive sampling is the strategy of identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are familiar with or experienced with an occurrence of interest and experience (Palinkas et al., 2015). Snowball sampling, as defined by Moser and Korstjens (2018), is the selection of participants through referrals

by previously selected participants or persons who have access to potential participants. Combat veterans with service-linked PTSD who agreed to participate in the study were asked if they know other veterans who might have an interest in participating in the study.

The inclusion criteria for participation in this study included veterans who must: (1) have served in combat, (2) have been clinically diagnosed with service-linked PTSD, (3) have served in one of the four of the primary branches of the U.S. military, (4) be between 25 to 60 years of age, (5) have identified as male, and (6) have participated or at least received some service from an employment program or agency. Participants were recruited through the employment programs that serve combat veterans with service-linked PTSD. For example, the VECTOR center in Middle, GA used social media in order to recruit potential participants for this study. Social media, specifically Facebook, was utilized to recruit participants from the researcher's social media page. The researcher posted a public recruitment status update or post that includes the participant recruitment information needed to participate in this study.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected by the use of semi-structured interviews with each combat veteran. Interviews were no more than 60 minutes and were audio-recorded with each participant's permission. Local participants had the option to meet face-to-face, virtually, or have their interview conducted by phone. The interviews utilized semi-structured interview guides. Moser and Korstjens (2018) suggested that in a semi-structured interview, a researcher would start with open questions associated to the topic, which

invites the participant to talk freely. This created a free-flowing interview and gave ample room for follow-up questions.

The field notes may constitute the entire data collected for the research study (e.g., an observational project) or contribute to it, such as when field notes supplement conventional interview data. Field notes refer to qualitative notes recorded by scientists or researchers in the course of field research during or after observation of a specific phenomenon being studied (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). For example, information likely to be included in the collection of the field notes was observations of environment or background noise, body language if face-to-face, and generally making observations that may not be able to be captured to explain the credibility or unreliability of the participant being interviewed. Participants were informed of the processes in which coding helped them remain anonymous in order to protect their identity.

### **Data Analysis**

Audio interviews and video interviews were transcribed into written transcripts, which were then be coded in a manner in which that the participants remained anonymous. Participants' anonymity was maintained with the use of pseudonyms along with identification numbers that coincide with a semi-structured interview guide. All transcripts were printed and organized in order to analyze the data appropriately. Each transcript was then reviewed in order to ensure that all components needed to explore the data exist appropriately. Transcripts were then be reviewed in conjunction to listening the audio recordings in order to ensure data quality.

The transcripts were quality checked against audio recordings. Transcripts were manually coded by the researcher. Coding involved grouping quotes that are similar and

by categories (Hashimov, 2015). For example, participants who said similar things related to job experiences and employment were categorized appropriately. The data were analyzed using a thematic content analysis approach. Thematic analysis is a common qualitative approach in looking at various sources to find patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). When conducting thematic analysis, there are six steps based on the methodology outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, the researcher observes all the data from the program's mission statement, goals, and transcripts from the interviews. Second, the researcher combines like codes; in this step, the researcher also observes codes that are directly associated to the research questions. Third, the researcher pools codes into groups to explore budding themes. Fourth, the researcher compares and reviews themes. Fifth, the researcher distinguishes the concluding themes that were presented in the analysis. The final step in thematic analysis is a description of the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each interview was transliterated using the participant's exact words.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness and validity of qualitative research is essential to what the researcher observes while exploring and conducting the study. Trustworthiness must be established by using the following concepts introduced by Lincoln and Guba (1985): (1) credibility, (2) transferability, (3) dependability, and (4) confirmability (Amankwaa, 2016). Credibility is a vital component of research. In order to establish credibility, the researcher must be able to associate the research outcomes to the representative research aspects in order to illustrate reliability within the research. Kornbluh (2015) explained that member checks are considered a respected approach for creating trustworthiness

because they provide the chance for researchers to recognize their personal biases and ratify truthfulness in presenting participants' lived experience. Member-checking is a crucial method in qualitative research that aids in creating credibility. This technique permits research participants to make clear their intents and offer any supplementary information if needed.

Transferability is essential to trustworthiness in that trustworthiness needs to consider not only impartial components of individual elements, but also how they come together and interact (Bellovin & Neumann, 2018). Transferability provides the evidence that the research findings from a study can be applied to multiple circumstances, cases, and other populations. Understanding the challenges and difficulty of judging trust is important when trying to support data replication (Yoon, 2017). However, the researcher cannot confirm if it is applicable to each individual setting. Dependability is another important component to establishing trustworthiness, and finds the research outcomes as being reliable and able to be replicated. Confirmability establishes the notion that the participants, instead of the researcher, influence the outcomes of the study.

### **Ethical Procedures**

It is essential to acknowledge the ethical issues that may become present with a study of this nature. This study involved the recruitment and participation of combat veterans with service-linked PTSD; therefore, there are some unique ethical considerations regarding their mental health status as well as how their information was used and managed to protect their identity (Smucker-Barneswell & Adams-Larsen, 2018). Participants were also made aware that they are able to withdraw from the study at any time. Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was



obtained. The participants were notified that their identities and the names of their respective employment program where they received services remained anonymous. Aliases were assigned to each study participant, which reduced the risk associated with their participation in the study. Consent from participants was obtained prior to data collection. The consent form (see Appendix D) provided the participants with information concerning the risks and benefits of participating in the research study. Keeping this population of participants safe and protected is the first priority of the researcher. Additionally, ensuring veterans with service-linked PTSD has all the resources available at their discretion is vital for all aspects of this particular research study.

Yip, Han, and Sng (2016) reiterated to researchers that due to the increase in research activities, concerns regarding ethical and legal issues should be made known as a general overview of ethical and legal principles that helped enable and guided the research to be conducted in accordance with the best practices of using human subjects and following the code of ethics. The researcher ensured that the following criteria were met to ensure that the human research agreement and protocols are followed in order to protect the academic integrity of the institution, participants, and researcher. Notably, the research (1) obtained informed consent, (2) respected the confidentiality of and the anonymity of research participants and respondents, (3) ensured that participants willingly participated in the research being conducted, (4) avoided harming participants, (5) ensured that academic integrity is maintained and protocols related to academic integrity are taken into consideration at all times, (6) used safety resources if necessary to ensure the safety of participants and researcher, (7) adhered to the code of ethics, and (8)

followed all standards and protocols that involve human subjects and take into consideration all ethical issues regarding consent, confidentiality, protection of human subjects, ethics, and legalities pertaining to research.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 described and discussed the methodological approaches that were used for this qualitative study. This chapter presented the research approach and design and presented the rationale for the approach and design and the role of the researcher. The chapter also presented the participant selection logic, instrumentation and the recruitment strategy, target population, data collection methods, and data analysis. Finally, this chapter described the confidentiality and all ethical concerns that are mentioned, methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and the ethical procedures. The goal of Chapter 4 was to provide the results from the research study conducted and illustrated the selected methodology application described above in Chapter 3.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings from the qualitative explanatory case study conducted on the lived experience of veterans with service-linked PTSD utilizing non-clinical employment programs while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce in order to answer the following questions:

1. How do combat veterans with service-linked PTSD describe the challenges they have with finding and retaining employment after being deployed from the military?
2. How do combat veterans with service-linked PTSD describe the type of support they received from employment programs in finding and retaining employment?

Chapter 4 further includes additional findings and supporting quotes of veterans with service-linked PTSD that have participated in employment programs that help veterans transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce seeking and maintaining employment.

### **Setting**

Several recruitment approaches were used in order to recruit the eight eligible study participants. First, five veterans were recruited with the assistance of a non-eligible military veteran that is a member of the American Legion in Albany Georgia. The non-eligible military veteran shared the study recruitment flyers to potential eligible veterans with the permission of the veteran post. One veteran was recruited through Robins Air Force base by word of mouth and others were referred by a veteran who participated in the research study. Two veterans were recruited by social media. For example, several

Facebook posts with the study recruitment flyer were posted in order to recruit participants for the study. Recruitment flyers were sent to friends of veterans through social media referrals online. Several individuals shared the recruitment flyers on Facebook and tagged potential study participants. Several organizations and combat veterans with a public Facebook profile were also messaged using Facebook messenger the recruitment flyer and details asking if the organization or person knows a veteran with service-linked PTSD that is eligible or is a potential person eligible to participate in the research study. One veteran was recruited through a general person of the public at a place of employment. Furthermore, purposeful snowball sampling was used in this research study. Veterans that volunteered and consented to participate in the study were asked if they know other veterans who might be interested in participating in the study. Sufficient descriptions of the transcripts were provided with substantial study information.

Potential participants were queried based on the inclusion criteria in order to ensure eligibility accuracy. Eight veterans were selected to participate in this study. The eight veterans were all diagnosed with service-linked PTSD and have utilized an employment program and services while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce in order to seek or maintain employment

### **Demographics**

The study participants consisted of two veterans from each of the four primary branches of the military. The sample consisted of six black veterans and two white veterans with service-linked PTSD. Participants ranged in the ages of 25 – 65 years of

age. Three participants served between 20 – 33 years in the military, four participants served between four and six years in the military, and one participant served approximately 14 years in military. Table I displays demographics of the research participant.

**Table 1: Insight and Demographics about Research Participants**

Participant	Race	Years in Military	Military Branch	Deployments	Year of PTSD Diagnosis	Age of Transition from Military to Civilian Workforce
R1	Black	5	Navy	1	2014	22 years old
R2	Black	14	Army	2	2004	23 years old
R3	Black	5	Navy	1	2018	24 years old
R4	Black	6	Army	2	2015	25 years old
R5	Black	26	Air Force	4	2006	49 years old
R6	White	4	Marine Corps	2	2013	23 years old
R7	White	20	Marine Corps	1	2016	38 years old
R8	Black	33	Air Force	2	2015	26 years old

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected by the use of semi-structured interviews with each combat veteran. Interviews were no more than 60 minutes and were audio-recorded with each participant's permission. All interviews were conducted by phone. None of the study participants had an interest in meeting face-to-face to participate in the interview. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide. Field notes were also taken during the interview.

### **Data Analysis**

Each audio-recorded interview was transcribed and quality-checked against the audio recordings. Transcripts were analyzed using Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic

content analysis approach. Braun and Clark (2006) thematic content analysis consist of a six-step approach which include: (1) familiarizing oneself with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing the themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report.

**Familiarizing oneself with the data.** For this step, the researcher listened to the interviews, transcribed the interviews and reread and viewed the data collected a few times. At this phase the researcher also made notes and delineated early impressions.

**Generating initial codes.** For this step, a codebook was created with primary and secondary codes. The initial codes were generated based on the interview questions while keeping the researcher questions in mind. Once initial codes were developed, additional codes were generated in a deductive manner as the transcripts were being coded. Each transcript was coded by identifying segments of text that seemed relevant to the research questions. Transcripts were manually coded in a Microsoft Word document. Once the coding was completed, codes were transferred to a Microsoft Excel document to review the codes and associated quotes from each transcript to identify themes.

**Searching for themes.** In this step, the codes were reviewed and organized to identify themes. During the step of searching for themes, patterns from the codes and associated quotes that were important or interesting that could provide answers to the research questions were identified. Most of the quotes were associated with one theme, although some overlapped with other themes. In concluding this step, the codes were organized into broader themes based on the research questions.

**Reviewing the themes.** For this step, themes were reviewed in order to check for additional themes that may have emerged throughout the data. During this phase, quotes from the transcript associated with each theme were reviewed to confirm if they supported the themes. `

**Defining and naming themes.** Themes were defined in order to convey the accounts the study results revealed. During this phase the researcher identified the essence of each theme. That is to say, what does theme really mean and are there subthemes and do themes interact and relate to each other? After this assessment of theme, each theme was named and operationally defined to present them in the written findings of the dissertation.

**Producing the report.** For this sixth step, the quotes from the study participants were chosen as cases. The selected quotes from participants were then summarized for the final analysis. All themes identified were connected back to the research questions. This particular approach searches for different patterns that emerge within the data. Furthermore, the data was further described and was discussed in order to present the study findings.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research studies, trustworthiness is an important concept because it allows for the development of the analysis of qualitative conditions independent of the limitations that are usually applicable in qualitative research. The trustworthiness of data has four major components: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability

(Amankwaa, 2016). These components are essential in validating the trustworthiness of the research and its findings.

Credibility was established by offering the study participants the chance to add any additional information regarding the study topic and responses to questions that were asked in the interview. Research study participants were able to provide additional information needed in order to ensure the intent of their responses. One or two participants declined to add any additional details but did engage in providing additional information when asked.

Transferability is proving that the research results from this study can be applied to various scenarios, subjects, and other populations. Lincoln and Gruba (1985) recommended having thick descriptive context surrounding their data collection experiences. Transferability can be subjective and this can be found in data collection section of the study. The information provided in this study can help frame the study scenario and allow others to make the decision if this study encompasses transferability.

Dependability of this research study proved that research outcomes were reliable and was able to be replicated. Dependability was established by conducting a systematic search through existing literature about veterans with service-linked PTSD utilizing employment programs in order to find or maintain employment. Several steps were incorporated in order to maintain the data collection process. For instance, transcripts were reviewed against the audio recordings and re-checked for further understanding. Additionally, all participants interviews were secured in a password protected device in



order to maintain secured files. Furthermore, these steps taken helped establish an audit trail.

Confirmability is the last criterion to establishing trustworthiness. Confirmability was established by utilizing an audit trail which provided details from the data collection and explanations regarding why certain methods were utilized were also discussed in order to interpret how certain themes appeared from the data. These methods were able to help provide significant understanding to the data analysis presented in the study. Additionally, these methods allow for a greater understanding of the research study conducted and it also gives a closer glimpse into the lives of veterans with service-linked PTSD that have sought employment post military life into the civilian workforce.

## **Results**

**Research Question: How do combat veterans with service-linked PTSD describe the challenges they have with finding and retaining employment after being deployed from the military?**

Several themes emerged from the data regarding how combat veterans with service-linked PTSD describe the challenges they have finding and retaining employment after being deployed from the military. The most dominant themes that emerged related to Research Question 1 were: (1) Medical Transition, (2) Challenges of Veterans Seeking Employment, (3) Educational Advancement, (4) Friends and Family Support , and (5) Expected to Make Comfortable living to Support Family. The sections that follow delineate the major themes that were generated from data in order to answer the first research question.

## **Medical Transition**

In discussing the challenges that veterans had with finding and retaining employment after leaving the military post deployment, all of the veterans shared the reasons why they transitioned from the military. A major theme related to their transition that emerged from the data was “Medical Transition.” All of the study participants reported that part of their transition from the military centered around medical issues or concerns that made their transition challenging. Health-related concerns included physical injuries sustained due to combat and service in the military, Service-linked PTSD and PTSD related symptoms (e.g., insomnia, depression, stress, anger, anxiety or aggravation due to serving in combat or serving a deployment), and death of spouse. Seven out of the eight respondents reported that they had difficulty transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce because of medical related issues. An Air Force respondent, R5, mentioned:

“It was kind of hard at first, because there wasn't nobody to talk to about what I was doing or going through, or where I'd been. Then, I went to the doctor and got me some help. I always had, uh, anger issues and stuff, when I got out.”

Navy respondent, R1 in describing his medical transition noted:

“I'm medically retired, and so my transition happened over the course of a year. So for me it was a lot of medical appointments and trying to get through the VA process and making sure that I was aware of all the benefits that were available to me.”

Marine respondent, R7, stated:

“It hurt me the most because of insomnia. Because I was not getting a lot of sleep, I would wake up from those nightmares and then I'd try to go back to sleep. And it was, uh, interrupting my sleep cycle. And when you don't get enough sleep, your stress levels go up and your patience dwindles. And, um, it's easier to, blow up on people when you're stressed out because of lack of sleep.” Air Force respondent, R5, again mentioned, “I went to the doctor and got me some help”.

### **Challenges of Veterans Seeking Employment**

Participants openly shared the challenges they experienced when discussing how their medical issues impacted their civilian work life. Additional challenges that veterans with service-linked PTSD encountered while seeking employment while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce centered around the PTSD diagnosis itself. Almost all of the veterans discussed the limitations their service-linked PTSD diagnosis had on them seeking employment or trying to maintain their employment while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. Five out of the eight participants indicated that the service-linked PTSD diagnoses had limitations and was a challenge in seeking employment. Navy respondent, R1, reported:

“Um, she was pretty much just saying like, "Well, you know, the police force is available, you know, and they have programs for people with PTSD, or you know, like, just try something. You know, a state job, just something that you can do for now," because basically, she was saying, "I know you have dreams, I know you want to do things, but there's a lot of limitations that you can't overcome, so

you need to focus on your family." Because I- I do have a kid, and she kept reminding me, like, "You have a son, so take these opportunities that we have." So I think it was a big challenge because I couldn't really get assistance in being able to achieve the goals I wanted, so I had to do a lot of it on my own."

While the other Navy respondent, R3, reported:

"I would say... Well, when I first got out the military, I had taken a position as a cable tech for Comcast. Not sure if you're familiar with that company, but I did that for about a year. My main thing when I got out, I was trying to utilize my clearance at first. But my daughter was born, so I didn't want to take a position that would put me in a different country or anything like that, so I kind of just let that go at the wayside. I decided to just take the... like I mentioned before, the Comcast position. With the Comcast position, I was able to be home every day. I would say that they were very accommodating with me or they were very veteran friendly when I was hired there. I did that about a year, from 2010 to 2011."

It is important to note that some veterans were not aware that they had service-linked PTSD and that they were also unaware whether or not their PTSD diagnosis until recently indicated that seeking employment had any known challenges at the time. Three of the eight stated that they did not know their PTSD status until recently. Air Force respondent, R5, noted:

“I don't really think it had no effect on it. I didn't know I had PTSD at the time I was transitioning. And the military didn't know I had it either. My doctor kept sending me to anger management classes, and then they finally sent me to a psychologist and a psychiatrist, and they diagnosed me with PTSD.”

While Marine respondent, R7, similarly reported:

“I didn't know I had PTSD at first. So um, well, now that I have a- a bachelor's degree, which opens up a whole lot... And all they have was their high school diploma. And when you go out into civilian workforce and try to get a job, the higher paying jobs usually require some kind of a- a college, at least some if not a- a- a four-year degree. So having that, degree under my belt, it made me more competitive for jobs that I was going to apply for.”

It was very difficult for some of the participants to cope with their PTSD diagnosis. Three of the eight study participants reported that the challenges faced as a veteran with service-linked PTSD seeking employment was difficult to cope with their PTSD diagnosis. For example, Navy respondent, R1, stated,

“Finding my first role was a little tricky, because of the medical aspect of um- of things, um, and still being a student. Um, I didn't necessarily want to stay in my field, so I didn't want to stay in intel anymore. So, trying to figure out how I was going to transfer my knowledge and skillset to a civilian position was hard.”

Army respondent, R2, also expressed the difficulty of transitioning from the military while trying to cope with PTSD diagnosis,

“So, it was very difficult to transition back, and do something as simple as go to the mall, and enjoy, uh, being in crowds without being very heightened in my awareness of where I was, and looking for that explosion, or looking for something to, to happen.”

These two veterans said it was hard to cope with PTSD diagnosis. Some veterans went a step further to expressed how hard it was to accept and cope with PTSD diagnosis especially when trying to find successful employment. The veterans shared the various coping methods they utilized when they transitioned from the military into the civilian workforce. Some of the veterans’ expressed a variety of coping methods that were reflective of their experience with transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. Participants expressed how the VA assisted them in their transition to the civilian workforce by providing them counseling services. For example, six of the eight respondents sought counseling through the VA in order to cope with their transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. Navy respondent, R1, said:

“I found that it was really helpful to be able to speak with someone um, at the VA, to help me kind of understand why I was feeling certain types of ways, and why I wasn't interacting with people, and why I was so jumpy or anxious. Um, and that helped me to understand my limitations because I do have limitations when I'm working. Um, and then if I know my own limitations, then when I go to the interview, I'm able to communicate those limits and limitations to the employer and say, "Hey look, I have to work remotely, you know, three days a week, or I'm not going to feel comfortable," or "I can't be touched," or you know,

but if you don't understand that about yourself, then you're not going to know, to tell your job that.” Army respondent, R2, stated, “The VA, um, was simply used to help put me back together again as a, as a person, in terms of the providing me psychological support, and some of the, uh, medical support that was needed.” A Marine respondent, R6, reported, “I would say, you know, well, it wasn't really from the military, it was from the VA. Just, like, counseling support for...you know, how to deal with anxiety on the job.”

These veterans all utilized the VA in order to seek counseling services needed in order to transition from the military into the civilian workplace. Moreover, it appeared that many of them believe seeking counseling and being in contact with the VA is an important factor in finding and retaining successful employment.

The veterans also described their transitioning into the civilian workforce from the military as being difficult and hard. The level of difficulty refers to the challenges that the veterans experienced in leaving the military to work in the civilian workforce. Almost all of the study participants were affected greatly due to their PTSD diagnosis when transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. Specifically, five out of eight of the veterans reported that their PTSD diagnosis and transition into the civilian workforce from the military affected them greatly. Navy respondent, R1, described the following experience as it relates to how his PTSD diagnosis affected him greatly while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce.

“So, um, let me- actually let me go backwards. I'm going to February of 2014, that date I was deployed. So, February of 2014 is when the incident happened,

and I was in Germany for a long time, and they didn't actually diagnose me with PTSD. They were actually more focused on the physical damage, the- the knee injury, and a concussion. So, it actually, it took an additional six to- six to eight months before they actually said that I had uh, um, related PTSD. So, it was later on in 20- 2014, that I was formally diagnosed with PTSD. ”

Navy participant, R3, described how his service-linked PTSD diagnosis affected him too while transition from the military into the civilian workforce. As a result he takes employment opportunities that are not likely to experience another incident that led to his service-linked PTSD diagnosis. Navy respondent, R3, explained:

“That was one of the main reasons that I took my first position as a patent examiner because I was trying to do things that wouldn't put me in those same predicaments, those same types of scenarios where I had to physically work with electrical equipment. But, it was just due to the fact that most of my `experience was an electronic technician. As a tech, it was hard for me to find a position outside of that, so it was just something I had to deal with, or I had to really keep those feelings of anxiety at bay because I would be more lucrative as electronic technician, as an engineer. It was just something I had to kind of get over with, but until I sought help with it, it was just something that I just had to deal with.”

A Marine respondent, R6, emphasized how his PTSD diagnosis and transition into the civilian workforce from the military affected him greatly. He discussed how difficult it was for him to transition into the civilian workforce due to trying to fight for his PTSD claim due to his deployment in combat. He noted:



“It was definitely rough. I mean, I've got my disability, you know, PTSD rating, but that's, yeah, that's about it. It took me seven years to fight that case, which is awesome (laughs).”

Another study participant shared his experience on how his PTSD diagnosis affected him while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. Marine respondent, R7, shared,

“And here's something else I wanted to share that might not be said to a lot of people, sometimes your worst enemies during war aren't the people you're fighting. They're the people that you're serving with. You know? Because a lot of people during combat, they're personalities aren't the same as when they were in peace time. And it can make things very stressful. You know? So I had events that happened between people that I worked with that I would have nightmares about more than the enemies that I was supposed to be worried about. You know? Poor decisions, bad things happening to people because of you know poor choices and stuff like that. But, um, I had a few people that I would- I could call and talk about it. Uh, that were friends of mine but most of those friends were military people that understood what I was going through.”

These veterans described in detail how their PTSD diagnosis impacted their experiences, although different in its actual experiences, they shed light on how they viewed their PTSD diagnosis and how they went about seeking employment. These respondents also described how they made decisions on taking certain employment opportunities due to their service-linked PTSD. Marine respondent, R7, discussed his

challenges with his expectations for employment and the expectations of what he believed his “fellow battle buddies” expectations were while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce.

“Well, for a lot of people it's tough because they're not prepared. A lot of these guys they have combat related jobs that don't have an equivalent, uh, you know, something equivalent to do in the civilian side. I mean if you're a combat, uh, if you're a rifleman that there isn't really a lot of jobs out there unless you're going to be in law enforcement. So a lot of these guys weren't going to school while they were in, but I did. I went to college while I was in. So when I got out, I already had a leg up on a lot of other people. And I also saved up a lot of money. I saved up a lot of money so that I would be prepared for that transition. And that's why the transition was a little easier than for most, for me, and within two years after retiring, I got my first job as a teacher.”

### **Educational Advancement**

One of the most salient themes that emerged from the data centered around the veteran's experience of advancing their education. This “Education Advancement” theme refers veterans with service-linked PTSD enrolling into college or pursuing higher education. Almost all of the study participants stated that attending college or earning a degree was an important aspect to their transition from the military. Seven of the eight veterans with service-linked PTSD indicated that the dominant aspect of their transition from the military centered around earning a college degree. For example, regarding his transition from the military, participant R1 noted that “...it got smoother, once I was able

to go into a new master's program." Another respondent, R3, stated "I decided to go back to school and that's when I began my path into becoming an electrical engineer. So around 2011 (From 2011 to 2014), I was in school and then January of 2015 was my first job outside of school." R2, explained: "I was actually a college student and a soldier at the same time. For instance, I would, um, take on recruitment positions so I can take classes at Albany State University".

Several of the study participants enrolled into college at some point in their transition from the military into the civilian workforce. These veterans felt that pursuing a degree or higher education could help them find employment in the field of their choice. For these respondents, the ideal way to increase their chances of getting employed or finding a higher paying job was going back to school once they were out of the military transitioning into the civilian workforce. Given this, education seemed to play a significant role in their transition.

### **Friends and Family Support**

In describing their transition from the military, veterans with service-linked PTSD talked about the level of support they received from family and friends. The veterans in this study expressed how their family and friends supported them through their transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. Six of the eight participants mentioned that their family and friends were very supportive as they transitioned from the military into the civilian workforce. Navy respondent, R1, reported, "My wife was very supportive of my transition." This particular participant shared how his wife was a major supportive individual and how this would make him feel less lonely throughout his

transition into the civilian workforce. Similarly, a Marine respondent, R7, also shared: “My wife was very supportive because she was with me the whole time I was in.” Both of these participants expressed how their spouse was present through their departing of the military into the civilian workforce and how their support gave them a sense of feeling abandoned through their transition.

Additionally, another Navy participant, R3, shared, “My family was very supportive. They were very supportive across the board.” This study participant discussed how his family was by his side while he was transitioning and how it meant a lot to him to have his family support behind him through this time in his life. Perhaps veterans with service-linked PTSD having family support is reflective of how support may play a positive role in veterans’ transition from the military into the civilian workforce. However, one respondent expressed that he lacked support from his family and friends as he transitioned from the military into the civilian workforce. Army respondent, R4, disclosed:

“A lot of them questioned were I ready to get out and then, on the other side, a lot of them just didn't know why I was doing it or didn't support the reason why I was getting out.”

While some of the participants described their family and friends as mostly very supportive as they transitioned from the military into the civilian workforce, the one participant that did not have family support, R4, also discussed how he felt disappointed that none of his family or friends could support his decision to leave the military and find

employment into the civilian workforce. Having the support needed appeared to be a positive factor in a veteran's transition from the military into the civilian workforce.

In discussing friends and family support the veterans also discussed the significance of taking care of their family, especially their children when seeking and maintaining employment. Three respondents indicated that they made all decisions based on taking in consideration their family. All three of these respondents' responses shared similar sentiments about decision making based on their family and being able to provide for them. For example, Air Force respondent, R8, shared: "To take care of my family. That was the most important thing." Navy respondent, R3, similarly expressed, "I have children, and I had to provide for them." In reference to having to make certain decisions about employment when transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce, Navy respondent, R1, stated, "Because I do have a kid." while taking into consideration his family obligations.

The veterans shared their experiences that revealed the importance of keeping family first when considering employment opportunities. The conversations with the veterans revealed how attitudes regarding family and work life play an important role in the decisions of seeking and retaining employment while transitioning as a veteran with service-linked PTSD from the military into the civilian workforce.

### **Expected to Make Comfortable Living to Support Family**

Another major theme that emerged from the data was "Expected to make a comfortable living to support family." This theme essentially describes veterans' desires to make sufficient income in order to support their family. One of the study participants

reported that they expected to be able to make a comfortable living in order to be able to provide for their family. Air Force respondent, R8, expressed,

“Well, just to be comfortable, you know? To take care of my family. That, that was the most important thing. Something that I would enjoy doing every day. And just, just to make ends meet, that's all.”

Another participant, Navy respondent, R3, expressed, “I have children, and I had to provide for them.”

Being able to support ones' family appeared to be a major contributing factor in the decisions centered around seeking employment. Additionally, finding the right kind of job was also something that seemed to be important to veterans. Some veterans took any job they could because they had a family to provide for and could not risk not having income during this time of transition.

**Research Question 2: How do combat veterans with service-linked PTSD describe the type of support they received from employment programs in finding and retaining employment?**

Several themes emerged from the data regarding the type of support that veterans with service-linked PTSD received from employment programs in finding and retaining employment. The most dominant themes that emerged from the data were: (1) Scarcity of Employment Programs and services, (2) Type of Employment Programs, (3) Experience with Employment, (4) Services Received, and (5) Recommendations. Several subthemes followed the dominant themes that emerged from the data.

### **Scarcity of Employment Program and Services**

When asked about what type of support they received from employment programs in finding and retaining employment, one of the major themes that emerged from the data was “Scarcity of Employment Programs and Services.” This theme refers to the lack of programs and services available to assist veterans with service-linked PTSD finding and staying employed. Three respondents mentioned that none of the transitional employment programs or services by the military helped them transition because there were not many available to them at the time of them transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. Army respondent, R2, noted:

“There, well may be some employment programs out there, but I don't, I've not heard of them. I read about them, but you have to do your own digging to find out, um, different benefits that you, um, may, uh, be qualified for, but nobody's just out there calling for veterans to come in and, and, and take, take advantage of this benefit or that benefit, so you have to really dig through, and talk to other uh, veterans, who may have, uh, benefit that you qualify for, but that, that you didn't know about, but you find out about it, and you have to go digging for it, and asking, in order to get that benefit. So, the benefits are not just readily available to, uh, veterans the way they should be.”

Army participant, R2, utilized an employment program or service, but described his difficulty seeking an employment program or service in order to find and maintain employment due to various reasons that he did not reveal. This participant also talked about how he just did not know what programs were really available to him. Similarly, a

different study participant expressed how during the time of his transition from the military into the civilian workforce that little to no employment programs was known to him or available when he was transitioning. For instance, Air force respondent, R8, stated,

“Not, one. Not during that time. Um, I haven't had anything, really. I guess when I transitioned back then, like I said, didn't have anybody, you know, to assist us in that area at the time. But it, like I said, it has gotten a lot better since then.”

This participant, R8, similarly to the above-mentioned Army respondent, R2, did not know of any transitional employment programs that were available to them due to the time in which they were transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. Furthermore, these veterans implied that their lack of knowledge of these programs had to do with the time period in which they served in the military could be reflective of why they felt that they did not receive proper resources for veterans with service-linked PTSD transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce.

Half of the study participants complained about not being aware of these employment programs and services related to them that existed until it was too late or at a later time during their transition from the military into the civilian workforce. Veterans not realizing the programs and services available to veterans until much later during their transition or when they were already out of the military also expressed their frustrations and wishes regarding their lack of awareness of the employment programs that were available to them. Three out of the eight veterans stated that they did not realize the programs and services that were available to veterans until much later during their



transition. For example, Marine respondent R7, detailed his challenges and experience of participating in employment programs. He cites his challenges and dislike for the lack of awareness available to veterans with service-linked PTSD and the employment programs available to them as they are transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce.

“But, uh, again because the other organizations weren't advertising, uh, to us what was available, a lot of the things that I could have taken advantage of, I wasn't able to take advantage of. And that's the sad thing that is about the ignorance of what- of what you have available to you.”

Air Force veteran R8, similarly agreed that there was a lack of education about the availability of employment programs for veterans with service-linked PTSD transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. R8 stated:

“I guess when I transitioned back then, like I said, didn't have anybody, you know, uh, assist us in that area at the time. But it, like I said, has gotten a lot better since then.”

All three participants agreed and implied that due to possibly the time frame in which they were transitioning from the military to the civilian workforce could have played a significant role in the availability and awareness of such employment programs for veterans with service-linked PTSD. These participants all did not really know about the specific employment programs that were available to them and it is reflective that the lack of awareness of the programs and services available to veterans can impact their ability to seek or gain employment.

### **Type of Employment Programs**

A key part to understanding the type of support veterans with service-linked PTSD received from employment programs while seeking and retaining employment centered around the type of employment program the veteran utilized. Veterans were asked what employment programs and services were the most and the least beneficial during their search for employment upon leaving the military. Each participant spoke about the different employment programs utilized while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. There were several types of employment programs utilized by these veterans and this research study revealed some programs were more helpful than others for those seeking and trying to retain employment. Certain study participants indicated that some of these programs were voluntary while others were mandated, but it also depended on whether or not a veteran qualified for participation in the program.

The only voluntary employment program mentioned during the interviews was One Stop. Only one of the study participants, Navy veteran R1 discussed participation in this program. According to R1, “One Stop is a program that offers veterans resources for employment, career training and counseling, as well as financial assistance.” Navy participant, R1, spoke in depth about how he was only made aware of certain transitional employment programs due to having to be qualified for participation in such programs.

Another employment program that was utilized by Navy participant, R1, was called Chapter 31. According to R1, Chapter 31 is recognized as a vocational rehabilitation and employment program. He also briefly discussed an additional program called Chapter 33 which he utilized while seeking employment as a veteran with service-

linked PTSD. The participant explained the main focus of Chapter 33 is to improve the employability of a participant through educational course work where the participant would obtain a degree prior to applying for employment in the civilian work force. Having a degree enable the participant to be more valuable and more employable, therefore being able to more quickly and successfully gain employment upon returning to the civilian workforce. All veterans were also asked, which of the employment programs they utilized helped them the least or the most. Only Navy participant, R1 and R3, were able to speak on this question. For instance, Navy participant, R1, reported, "I would say "One Stop" helped the least for me." Navy participant, R3, stated, "I mentioned before, the Chapter 33, but that's something that was given to all vets." Chapter 33 program seemed to be considered a mandated program that was automatically given to veterans to utilize as they were transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. However, only Navy participant, R3, spoke on this specific program. Nevertheless, Navy participant, R3, further exclaimed:

"But the Chapter 31 specifically, was a benefit that was given to disabled veterans, so that was one that I eventually shift to towards the end of my Bachelor's degree."

Furthermore, these specific study participants, R1 and R3, who were both Navy veterans, had discussed very different experiences in utilizing the different employment programs that they participated in while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce in order to seek or retain employment. Only two of the eight veterans indicated that they

participated in mandated transitional employment programs. The other study participants did not disclose information on whether or not employment programs were mandated.

One of the mandated programs mentioned was the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). According to the two veterans that utilized TAP, the program was a mandatory transition program for veterans transitioning from the military into the civilian world.

Navy participant, R1, explained:

“While in the military, during your first- well, your last six months, it's TAP, whereas it helps you transition out of the military. And there they give you access to career counselors. Um, so actually, I worked with the TAP program, so I tried to- so, when I was working on my Master's degree, it required interns- um, an internship program. So, I used the military, um the career counseling office to help do my um, hours, those required hours- hours. So, I worked actually, very closely with the career counselors and that program, it basically gives- it requires you, like a check off list. You have to go see the career counselors. You have to actually present an employment and career plan, or a training plan, or whatever it is that you're choosing to do.”

Furthermore, Navy participant, R1, reported:

“Um, I would say two things, um, TAP program is a really, really, really good option, um, a resource, not option really. It's required by everyone to attend, but a lot of people don't take it seriously. You know, it's kind of a you check of the boxes, then you continue on with your transition.”

Marine respondent, R6, described his experience with the TAP program the following way:

“We did, we did, like, SEPS and TAP, before I left active duty, but, after, I was in the Reserves for three years and there were zero components there. I mean, they, there was none, you know, that's probably where some of these guys needed a boost in Reserve units, that they're just biding time and they don't, you know, they've got a whole free month that they could be working.”

When this Marine veteran was asked to describe the SEPS program, he could not recall at the time of the interview specifics surrounding the SEPS program. While discussing veteran participation in employment programs, the veterans were also asked to describe their expectations for employment as a veteran with service-linked PTSD transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. Only one study participant described their expectations for employment post military into the civilian workforce, while the others simply indicated that they did not have many expectations regarding their employment. Navy respondent, R1, described his expectations for employment while he was transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce as the following:

“For the TAP program, um again, with those two things, with the VA and with the education, and helping me to map out my- and I'm sorry, actually, too, so I forgot actually, one benefit that the TAP program, um, helped me to take advantage of, would be the CLEP- CLEP, they allow you to test out of courses and- and then if you're part of the TAP program, you actually do it free. So, it actually allowed me to um, speed through a lot of credits, because I could just test out, like, English,

you know, Math, Sciences, all of that. Um, without having to pay anything for it, um, so it sped up the time it took me to finish my degree, so I ended up finishing my Bachelors before leaving the military, through the TAP program, enabled me to then apply for my Masters program. Um, and then- so then I left the- when I left the military, I did have a degree under my belt, so I stood out more, you know, for finding employment. So I would say that was really, really valuable.”

Navy participant, R1, further discussed his experience utilizing the TAP program and how it helped him understand the G.I. Bill. Navy participant, R1, stated:

“So TAP was the biggest thing that I did before me leaving the military and speaking to the career counselors a lot. Um, they actually helped me to um, understand the GI Bill, and how I'd be able to maximize um, the- the benefits of it with X and Y, so instead of taking- because the GI Bill, it pays you for three years' worth of um, education. However, you can take technically, as many classes as you want, so it- I ended up taking like, double at the University, because I want my three years to stretch out, actually it ends in August. So I was- am able to get two Masters degrees and my PhD pretty much paid for, because I just took a lot of classes in three years. So, the career counselors who helped me to see that loophole in the program, and then once I left the military, it was One Stop, that's like, civilian or veteran ran, that helped me to figure out what options were in the new location that I was at, because there's no military base around.”

It is important to note that some of the veteran participants were unable to describe or did not remember many of the names of the transitional employment

programs they utilized while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. This could be due to their service-linked PTSD diagnosis or just not taking the time to really understand what they were actually participating in. Three out of eight of the respondents did not know the name of the program they utilized as a transitional employment program or service provided by the military. Marine respondent, R6, stated:

“Um, I mean, I really didn't know there are some programs out there, but I didn't really pursue any of that. I mean, I use the GI bill now, and, uh... I don't know, I guess I got a couple counseling classes on, you know, reentering the workforce and, you know, how to deal with it, and things like that, but it was very minimal.”

While Marine respondent, R6, mentioned, “SEPS” alongside “TAP” he could not remember the details of the SEPS program. However, he was able to talk about the TAP program in greater detail as it relates to the type of employment program he utilized for employment purposes during his transition from the military into the civilian workforce. Army participant, R4, described his experience transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce where he participated in classes required as a part of this transition. Army respondent, R4, reported:

“The Unit Program. Before you get out of the military, you go through a self-unit process and your unit kind of helps you transition out. Not having my unit really care that I was getting out would probably be the one I would say was the least.”

This participant referred to the mandated program he participated in as, “The Unit Program” because he couldn't recall the actual name of the exact mandated program.

Additionally, he stated the lack of genuine support from his unit while participating in the required classes provided by the military was the biggest challenge he faced during his transition from the military into the civilian workforce. Furthermore, when participants were asked the names of all the employment programs they participated in, most of the participants could not recall specific names of these programs. Therefore, it's difficult to determine which of the programs were mandated and which ones were voluntary.

### **Experiences with Employment Program**

Participants discussed their points of views, challenges and experiences with seeking and maintaining employment after utilizing employment programs. The Veteran's challenges and experiences in finding and maintaining work with the use of employment programs and supportive services were described in detail. These challenges and experiences seem to indicate that certain supportive services veterans received from the employment programs can either help or hurt their attempts at seeking and finding employment after leaving the military into the civilian workforce

The veterans talked about the different types of supportive services that they received from the employment programs they participated in while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. Some of veterans spoke on the different types of employment support, in the terms of services, received that they acquired while seeking employment. Participants indicated that some classes were required of them before leaving the military into the civilian workforce. Several veterans described the type of classes they were required to take while transitioning out of the military. For instance, five out of the eight respondents reported that they took mandatory classes on transitioning from the



military into the civilian workforce which was required as a part of transitioning out of the military into the civilian workforce. It is not known if these classes are the required classes or programs referenced by other participants because veterans did not expand on these classes or programs when asked if they could provide more context. Navy veteran R1 reported:

“I left the military, I was a part of one program, um, after they helped me transition out of the military, because you're able to sit in, into classes um, it's like every Thursday, and we then, um, our chief allowed us to leave work early for those who were transitioning out, officially, medically reasons. We had to sit in, and they would talk to us about um, different programs that were available.”

One of the services that veterans reported that they received was career counseling services. Career counseling in this context refer to the support mechanism that veterans received in seeking and maintaining employment. These services are generally designed to assist them in creating and executing a plan that works in line with their employment goals. Veterans receiving career counseling indicated that this helped them be able to maintain employment to an extent. These participants expressed how career counseling helped them to maintain their jobs in the civilian workforce. Five out of the eight study participants reported that they received career counseling to some degree. For example, Navy respondent, R1, stated:

“Again, like I said, it was veteran and civilian ran, where they're- they're career counseling and job placement um, specialists, who they will help you with resume

writing and they will basically again, narrow down your options, based on what they think that you can get, in the area.”

Career counseling seems to have given some of the veterans a step up in terms of maintaining employment in the civilian workforce. Additionally, the respondents' experiences with finding and maintaining successful employment appear to be reflective of having received career counseling and earning a college degree. Navy participant, R3, mentioned,

“They also helped with career counseling. Well, my VA counselor at the time for the Chapter 31 program had, I guess, he had made sure that this particular career field that I was getting into was going to be suitable given my current skillset. What he did was assess my resume, assess my background in the military, and once I presented him with the particular career path, he gave the okay, saying that yes, you can pursue this, but it was... In summary, it was just that they gave a very strict plan on how to get you to be employable, if that makes any sense

This participant described how career counseling helped with his employability. He also expressed how his career counselor reassured him that adjusting into the civilian workforce was a process that is common, yet complex among many veterans, who left the military.

One of the career counseling services that the veterans indicated that they received was interviewing skills training. Five of the study participants mentioned receiving interviewing skills and courses that related to transitioning from the military

into the civilian workforce. The veterans expressed how the interviewing skills training they received help them to some extent in seeking employment in the civilian workforce. As noted by Navy respondent, R1, reported, “You know, that you have them sit down and go through your resume with you, practice interviews with you. Um, and just give you a heads up on how the process works, as civilian.”

As noted from the previous quotes, the study participants also indicated receiving resume writing services. Resume writing services refer to assistance that veterans received in translating their military employment experiences and qualifications in order to find successful civilian employment. Seven out of the eight respondents reported that they received resume writing as a type of employment support in order to maintain or seek employment. Navy respondent, R1, reported that resume writing was something he received in terms of helping him seek employment. Additionally, these participants expressed how resume building centered around skills that focused on tailoring professional abilities and resume building skills. Four of the eight study participants mentioned that they utilized resume building skills from the services received to assist with employment. Navy respondent, R3, stated:

“Well again, they use the resume building sessions, you can sit down with your counselor and he'll do a job search with you.” Marine respondent, R6, noted, “Uh, it's like, it's the, that's the term for the, um, the little out boarding class that you receive after active duty. You go through about a week-long worth, worth of courses on how, like, to make your resume look good and, and get your, um... I don't know. You know, a professional view of yourself. Like, just kind of help

you make that progression into the civilian world, structure you a little bit for, you know, business jobs and things like that. But... it's a room full of 500 people that are, you know, watching a PowerPoint, so.”

However, not all study participants were satisfied with the resume writing services received. For example, Air Force veteran R5 exclaimed,

“When I got ready to retire, they send you through a transition assistance class. And then, from there, you'd need ... uh, family advocate people, who help you do resumes. And, but, by the time you get out, the resume still be worth nothin'. You gotta keep updating it yourself. So, luckily, I had this education to know to do that.”

Another Air Force respondent, R8, similarly described his dissatisfaction with receiving resume writing support.

“To be honest with you, like I said, it was just, just an overview. You know, to point you in the right direction. It, it, you know, is just a little ... how you fill out a resume, how you apply for a job, Just stuff like that.”

Both Air Force respondents felt that the resume writing support lack an important aspect in the support it gives veterans who have service-linked PTSD transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. Based on their responses, these participants indicated that the resume writing service lacked the ability to meet their employment needs.

While talking about resume services, only one veteran discussed how the Work Source platform provided him the service of resume writing in order to help him prepare

for employment in the civilian workforce. According to Army participant, R4, Work Source is a veteran platform that helps veterans facing employment challenges after leaving the military into the civilian workforce. It was not made known whether or not this program is voluntary or mandated. This platform is also not associated with the TAP program and is more of a benefit that veterans are able to utilize when transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. Army respondent, R4, stated:

“The first one, they do a weekly convention every week. It's called Work Source. Every Wednesday from 11 to 1, they have different veteran programs that come in and they do on the spot hiring as long as you meet the qualifications. That was the first initial step. After that, it was just taking classes, learning how to write a resume the right way, learning how to translate military lingo back to civilian terms, which was part of the hardest decision that you have to kind of come to grasps with because you're used to this jargon or this language every day.

Furthermore, Army participant, R4, specifically said that, “Trying to say something military related back into civilian terms was hard.” This participant expressed how difficult it can be to translate his military experience into civilian terms in order to qualify for employment. Throughout this participant’s interview, there were indications that this particular participant emphasized the challenges he faced while converting his military experience for civilian employment.

It is important to note that four of eight respondents mentioned that they cannot specifically name any type of employment program or other employment resources that they utilized in order to seek employment. This could be contributed to their service-

linked PTSD. Army respondent, R2, reported, “None” and one of the Marine respondents, R6, similarly stated:

“Um, none really. Like I said, I didn't really pursue many of the programs. Um, you know, they're available on, um, like, your benefits and things like that, but I didn't really pursue any of those. Probably should have.”

### **Recommendations**

During the interviews, veterans with service-linked PTSD made several recommendations regarding what future veterans that are transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. This theme of recommendations centers on the different ways in which these participants feel other veterans should consider participating in and receiving services that can help them transition with less difficulty into the civilian workforce. Four of the eight veterans recommended that transitioning veterans with service linked PTSD transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce should utilize the services and programs that are offered to them. For example, Navy respondent, R1, stated:

“I would say two things, um, TAP program is a really, really, really good option, um, a resource, not option really. It's required by everyone to attend, but a lot of people don't take it seriously. You know, it's kind of a- a you check of the boxes, then you continue on with your transition. But to really take advantage of the career counselors, take advantage of the CLEP, the educational resources and- and the- the opportunities to speak with VA representatives. That's a really good program that allows you to have all the tools you need, to transition successfully.

And then number two would be not to put themselves in a box, because if you- if you only take on the roles that there, you're told initially that you can handle then you're going to, you know, likely be taking on roles that are a lot less, or lower level than you actually have the ability to do. Because I mean, again, no one told me that I would be able to, in a short three years, be you know, um, a lead you know, UX Quantitative Researcher for the Federal Government.”

Another recommendation for veterans with service-linked PTSD was for the Chapter 31 employment program, which is recognized as a vocational rehabilitation and employment program according to Navy participant, R3. Navy respondent, R3, noted:

“I would say definitely use the Chapter 31, because I've definitely recommended this to all my friends and family that are part of the military, and ex-military members and vets so if you have a chance to switch from the Chapter 33 program to the Chapter 31, I would recommend switching to that because you get those additional benefits outside of just your BAH, your housing allowance. So it definitely to do, switch to the Chapter 31 program, to definitely keep a record of all incidents that might have led to some type of disability that you develop in the military. So you want to keep a record of a situation, whether it be some trauma that you might experience on the battlefield, you might keep a record of that. Like in my particular case, if you gotta go to the hospital after being in electric shock, you want to call the hospital, make sure you get a record of that. You want to also make sure that you get seen by a private doctor outside of the military. So you don't want to specifically use VA doctors, you want to get seen by physicians

outside of the VA medical system, outside of the military system, because you want to get an outside opinion. And I notice at the VA they are more responsive , and more acceptable of outside or private doctors opinions on things . It's good to have a secondary opinion on your particular disability. So you want to get looked at by a different physician as well.”

Another participant, Army respondent, R4, recommended:

“The first thing I would say is to know that it's okay to get help. That would be my first piece of advice. Know that it's okay to get help. I would also let them know to understand that there's nothing wrong with having PTSD. Going through what we go through in the military, it's understandable and it's more common now, but always seek help and know that there's someone there to listen to you, whether it be up here or a battle buddy or you just call the help line. There's always help out there. ”

This participant acknowledged that it is okay to get help and seek professional help in order to manage the transition from the military into the civilian workforce as a veteran with service-linked PTSD. The participant also attributed his acceptance of his PTSD diagnosis and seeking psychological help when needed for his transition from the military into the civilian workforce. Furthermore, this theme centered around utilizing the VA services and programs offered to veterans with service-linked PTSD transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. Five out of the eight study participants recommended that veterans with service linked PTSD transitioning from the military should use the VA services and programs offered. Marine respondent, R7, suggested:



“They need to call the VA clinic right away and get some support mechanisms they have available to them. Because like I said, a lot of the time people suffer needlessly, when there's help out there. And ever since, uh, you know, that VA scandal they had a few years back were they, they had like people in the VA clinic that were dying and stuff. Ever since then, there's been a big emphasis on making sure we take care of our veterans so the support, the advertisement for support is out there. And it's a lot easier to get connected and to network so that you can get all the support you need so first thing you need to do is get in contact with the VA clinics and see what they can do to help you out. Because I- I'll give you another example. I didn't know that, um, I could get, um, a pre-hearing aid. And, uh, so once I found out about that, I- I'm not wearing a \$4,000 hearing aid that I didn't have to pay a cent for. And I certainly couldn't afford that. So again I would advise people to, uh, call the VA clinics immediately and- they will counsel you about what's available to you.”

Many participants felt that veterans should call the VA for support mechanisms immediately in order to help with their transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. This theme that emerged centered on ensuring that veterans take the initiative and call the VA for support mechanisms that will help veterans transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce find and retain employment. Five out of the eight respondents insisted that they recommend that veterans with service linked PTSD transitioning from the military should call the VA immediately for support mechanisms. Some of these mechanisms for support are mental health services, military peer support and other VA experts. Navy respondent, R1, recommended:

“To take advantage of the career counselors, take advantage of the CLEP, the educational resources and- and the- the opportunities to speak with VA representatives. That's a really good program that allows you to have all the tools you need, to transition successfully.” While Army respondent, R2, mentioned, “I would advise them the military side, and the VA side, but also, uh, find a vehicle or outlet out in the civilian world where you can, you can talk about those things.” The other Navy respondent, R3, further recommended, “You want to also make sure that you get seen by a private doctor outside of the military. So you don't want to specifically use VA doctors, you want to get seen by physicians outside of the VA medical system, outside of the military system, because you want to get an outside opinion. And I notice at the VA they are more responsive, and more acceptable of outside or private doctor's opinions on things. It's good to have a secondary opinion on your particular disability. So you want to get looked at by a different physician as well.”

Veterans also had recommendation for the employment programs that serve veterans transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. Their recommendations were largely based on their experiences on seeking and trying to maintain employment. Half of the study participants mentioned that they recommend that employment programs and services utilized by veterans with service-linked PTSD transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce should listen carefully to the needs and concerns of its veterans. Navy respondent, R3, remarked:

“It's all about maintaining. If you have the ability to maintain, you want to make sure that for a veteran that you're servicing truly has the ability to maintain that particular occupation. Because I've seen a lot of veterans get into career fields that they might have got into through the Chapter 31 program or the Chapter 33 program but they failed to maintain it due to them having PTSD or other mental or physical disabilities. So it would be something where they need to follow up with the veterans, I would say after a year, definitely after a year of employment. You want to follow up with the vet and make sure that they're still good at the job, how they get along socially, how they're going to get along performance wise. So it's just something that they need to do where they can't just wash their hands with that after a couple months. I think this is something that they need to continually follow up with the vet after. That's the only real main thing, the only main issue I had. So that's the only reason I'm saying that.”

This respondent also talked about the importance of enforcing following up on the services or programs veterans with service-linked PTSD participated in while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce in order to gain greater insight on its different elements that may affect veterans. Army respondent, R4, recommended:

“I would say be more open minded to what they've gone through, what we've gone through.” This study participant emphasized the need for employment programs and service providers to be more accepting and receptive of the veterans that are transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce.

Veterans felt that they needed to be supported more and in a better manner. Four out of eight study participants recommended that employment programs and services utilized by veterans with service-linked PTSD transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce should support veterans with service-linked PTSD more. Army respondent, R4, reported:

“The biggest thing would be to be as open with us as we are open with you because veterans, we carry a status, going through everything we've gone through and the stuff that it took for us to even become a veteran as a challenge and a testimony to itself, but just be more open minded and understand that we come with a lot of experience, but with experience also comes with a lot of pain.”

A Marine respondent R7, said:

“First thing they should realize what an asset they are because we're talking about people who understand how to work hard. They know how to get to work on time. Um, they have good manners. They know how to do what they're told. I mean a lot of employees or employers all they want is someone that can show up to work on time sober and, uh, be dependable. And that's one thing that a lot of employers have to realize that after people have had that kind of strict training, they're a lot easier, uh, to work with as far as getting things done. And they're not slackers.”

Air Force respondent, noted:

“Well, I would have the VA, get involved directly rather than just branches of service, because a lot of times they really don't understand. They're used to

dealing with guys already in the military, not, not guys that have, um, transitioned out of the military.”

This participant emphasized more involvement and awareness of the veteran’s needs and wants while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. The overall expressions from these participants appear to suggest that veterans need to truly be the priority for these programs and service providers of veterans with service-linked PTSD.

Half of the study participants felt that the programs and service providers of veterans with service-linked PTSD should be more open-minded. This refers to employment programs and services being provided to veterans with service-linked PTSD be more unbiased when dealing with this population transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. Half of the study participants shared the recommendation of being unbiased towards the needs and wants of veterans with service-linked PTSD while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. For instance, Marine respondent, R6, recommended:

“I would say have, you know, programs that, yes, they help you gain employment, you know, meaningful employment, but there's go to be another aspect to it, you know, like, match it. You know, a position that can deal with somebody who might have anxiety or panic attacks or, you know, episodes on the job, they've got to be willing to, you know, understand that that's happening, and I guess a little bit of education for whoever, you know, they're trying to get jobs for

these veterans and to make sure they understand what type of veteran they're getting. You know things of that nature.”

Army respondent, R4, suggested:

“The biggest thing would be to be as open with us as we are open with you because veterans, we carry a status, going through everything we've gone through and the stuff that it took for us to even become a veteran as a challenge and a testimony to itself, but just be more open minded and understand that we come with a lot of experience, but with experience also comes with a lot of pain.”

This participant implicated that the more open employment programs and services are with veterans with service-linked PTSD the better rapport can be created between the different stakeholders involved in transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce.

### **Summary**

This chapter discussed the data results and dominant themes that answered the study research questions. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and gain a deeper understanding of the lived experience of veterans with service-linked PTSD who participated or utilized non-clinical employment programs designed to assist combat veterans with service-linked PTSD in finding and maintaining successful employment. Additionally, the goal of this study was to better understand and explore the specific ways in which these programs assisted combat veterans with service-linked PTSD in finding work as well as providing them with skills and other resources to remain

employed after they start working. The key findings of the study were summarized in each section in order to answer the two research study questions.

A total of eight study participants were interviewed over the phone for this qualitative explanatory case study. The semi-structured interview questions were constructed in order to gain a deeper understanding from the lived experiences of veterans with service-linked PTSD that have participated in non-clinical employment program. The Schlossberg's Theory of Transition was applied to this study. All of the study participants were male veterans. The eight study participants all had experiences of participating in non-clinical employment program transitioning as a veteran with service-linked PTSD from the military into the civilian workforce seeking and trying to retain employment.

In research question one, study participants responses indicated that the following dominant themes emerged from the data: (1) Medical Transition, (2) Challenges of Veterans Seeking Employment, (3) Educational Advancement, (4) Friends and Family Support , and (5) Expected to Make Comfortable living to Support Family. These themes indicated that a variety of factors contributed to veterans with service-linked PTSD employability that participated in employment programs while seeking or retaining employment after leaving the military transitioning into the civilian workforce. Additional, data pertaining to the demographics and various subthemes are also factors that contributed to the employability of veterans with service-linked PTSD were discovered in this study.

In research question two, study participants responses revealed the following dominant themes that also emerged from the data: (1) Scarcity of Employment Programs and services, (2) Type of Employment Programs, (3) Experience with Employment, (4) Services Received, and (5) Recommendations. While great advancements have been made in creating employment opportunities for veterans with service-linked PTSD transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce, it is evident in the research findings that there is an inconsistency in how veterans with service-linked PTSD seek and retain successful employment while participating in employment programs or utilizing services provided to this population of study participants.

Additionally, from these interviews, the experiences that these participants had to go through significantly impacted their employment outcomes. However, it is essential to note that the data set indicated that the lack of following up on veterans after they had left the military and went into the civilian workforce was concerning and impacted the participants future employability in a variety of ways.

Furthermore, it can be concluded from the interview responses that veterans need more available non-clinical employment programs and services that provide more access to be granted to this population of veterans without so many qualifications and restrictions being required for their eligibility to participate in such employment programs. Chapter 5 concludes the study, discusses limitations and makes recommendations for future research.



## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and gain a deeper understanding of the lived experience of male combat veterans with serviced-linked PTSD who have utilized non-clinical employment programs to find and maintain successful employment. This chapter includes a discussion on the significant findings as it related to the literature of the lived experience of veterans with serviced-linked PTSD who have participated in employment programs in order to seek or retain employment in the civilian workforce post military. Also included is a discussion on the role of employment programs for veterans with service-linked PTSD and their employability as they transitioned from the military into the civilian workforce. Chapter 5 further includes the interpretations of the study results, the limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and concludes with a small summary.

This study explored the lived experiences of veterans with service-linked PTSD utilizing non-clinical employment programs in order to seek or retain employment upon transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. The literature review focused on several studies which related to the obstacles that veterans with service-linked PTSD face after leaving the military as they transition into the civilian workplace. post military service, workforce employment programs and their support of veterans with service-linked PTSD, veterans' employment experiences and perceptions of the transition process into the civilian workforce, and the support provided to veterans with the necessary resources as they face obstacles in seeking and retaining employment were presented. It

was discovered that, based on the previous literature, that the employability of veterans with service-linked PTSD that have utilized non-clinical employment programs in order to seek and retain employment were not studied and the understanding of the benefits of participating in these programs was found to be unexplored to significant degree.

Additionally, a synopsis of research studies that have formed and established operations concerning Schlossberg's Theory of Transition and the validity of how and when employment programs that support veterans with service-linked PTSD can or should be utilized for employability was also reviewed in the literature review. The Schlossberg's (1981) Theory of Transition guided this study. Schlossberg's Theory of Transition's four main components known as the Four Ss: (1) situation, (2) self, (3) social support, and (4) strategies (Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015; Stokes, Schultz, & Alpanan, 2018) were appropriately applied to each of the interview questions in the structured interview guide in which one of the four S's were applicable.

Research was conducted on the lived experiences of eight veterans with service-linked PTSD that have utilized employment programs while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce to seek and retain employment. Participants responded to the semi-structured interview guide. The purpose was to explore and understand the individual lived experiences of veterans from each of the four primary branches of the military. The explanatory case study revealed the employability of veterans with service-linked PTSD that have participated in employment programs to find and maintain civilian employment after leaving the military. Several themes emerged from the data that was relevant to answering the two proposed research questions as it

relates to the employability of veterans with service-linked PTSD utilizing non-clinical employment programs. The findings in this study showed that veterans with service-linked PTSD experienced challenges while others found benefits from participating in employment programs during their transition into the civilian workforce. The themes further provide in depth insight and understanding on the individual veterans' lived experiences with participating in non-clinical employment programs while transitioning from the military in order to find employment in the civilian workforce.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

Although each of the eight veterans' experiences differed, several of the dominant themes that emerged were evident components in understanding and exploring the employability of veterans with service-linked PTSD that utilized employment programs. These themes that emerged have a compelling point to them, as what is imperative to the specific differences or similarities regarding employability of these veterans. The dominant themes are further summarized below.

**RQ1. How do combat veterans with service-linked PTSD describe the challenges they have with finding and retaining employment after being deployed from the military?**

Veterans with service-linked PTSD described their individual challenges they had seeking and retaining employment when they transitioned from the military into the civilian workforce. The findings related to research question revealed the following themes: (1) Medical Transition, (2) Challenges of Veterans Seeking Employment, (3) Educational Advancement, (4) Friends and Family Support, and (5) Expected to Make

Comfortable living to Support Family. In discussing the challenges that they encountered with finding and retaining employment after leaving the military, all of the study participants revealed several reasons why they transitioned from the military. All of the veterans discussed their experiences with transitioning from the military being centered around medical issues or concerns that made their transition challenging. Nearly all of the participants mentioned the limitations their service-linked PTSD diagnosis had on them seeking employment or retaining employment while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. It is important to point out that some veterans mentioned that they were not aware if whether or not their PTSD diagnosis had any known challenges to finding employment in the civilian workforce at the time. This was due to participants being diagnosed with PTSD long after they left the military and transitioned into the civilian workforce. Participants also described the difficulty of coping with their PTSD diagnosis when seeking or retaining civilian employment after leaving the military. Participants discussed coping methods they utilized in order to assist with the transition from the military into the civilian workforce after leaving the military. Some coping methods mentioned were forms of exercise, keeping faith or going to church or engaging in a hobby in order to deal with transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. Exercise can positively influence the psychological health of individuals (Morgan, Hourani and Tueller, 2017). According to Cornish, Lannin, Wade & Martinez, (2017) engaging in religious activities and exercises may assist a person to be able to cope with difficult experiences because of the range of intrapersonal and shared aspects that can foster recovery, such as providing a outline to comprehend and accept difficult experiences in life. Cornish et al. (2017) also mentioned having a hobby being an

understudied coping mechanism. These coping mechanisms that participants in this study mentioned reflected similar, if not the same methods seen amongst military populations.

Many veterans discussed the level of difficulty they faced while transitioning into the civilian workforce. Some participants described this experience as “hard” or “very difficult.” Ultimately, participants’ experiences with finding and maintaining employment shaped their ability to find successful employment. Veterans discussed that attending college or earning a degree was an important factor to their transition from the military. The participants discussed a clear preference for advancing their education by earning a college degree in order to seek employment in a field of personal choice. Having family and friends support appeared to be a significant motivational factor in seeking and retaining employment that was able to provide a comfortable living for veterans and their families. This study revealed an important factor, family and friends support, being of crucial significance when it comes to them getting through their transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce.

***Medical Transition.*** Participants reported having difficulty with finding employment during their transition from the military into the civilian workforce due to medical issues associated with their service-linked PTSD. Seven out of eight participants in this study discussed how their medical issues were a main contributing factor to the level of difficulty faced while trying to gain employment. The difficulties in finding employment that were expressed by these participants closely aligned with findings from previous studies such as (Culp, 2014; Robertson, Miles, and Mallen, 2014; & Sayer, Carlson and Frazier (2014) in regards to veterans and employability difficulties. Sayer et al. (2014) concluded that a variety of challenges that combat veterans with service-linked PTSD

face daily when trying to reintegrate into the civilian workforce from combat. Although the findings of this study were consistent with the findings from Sayer et al., (2014), the results of this study implicated that medical issues caused by or related to having service linked PTSD, negatively affected the participants' ability to find and gain employment in the civilian workforce.

***Challenges of Veterans Seeking Employment.*** Some studies found that many challenges that combat veterans with service-linked PTSD face daily when transitioning into the civilian workforce from combat are employment issues, medical issues, lack of support and work history transferability (Ainspan, 2011 & Hayden and Buzzetta, 2014). These findings are consistent with the findings in this study. Participants experienced issues with finding or retaining employment, medical concerns and employment transferable skills. Additionally, this study's findings emphasize the importance of understanding how these challenges may impact the employability of veterans with service-linked PTSD seeking or retaining employment in the civilian workforce. Understanding veterans' needs too, is consistent with the literature related to the challenges veterans experience leaving the military have similarities and variations depending on the veterans' experience utilizing employment programs while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. The study participants also had similar if not the same challenges when trying to return to the civilian workforce after the military that aligned with study results from (Sayer et al, 2014). This study's findings indicated that veterans with service-linked PTSD faced employment challenges such as retaining employment (Sayer et al., 2014). All participants described the limitations their service-linked PTSD diagnosis had on them seeking or retaining employment while

transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. Study participants cited focusing on family and taking employment opportunities that wouldn't allow them to deploy away from their children as a short-term solution to the challenge of finding employment that is suitable to their individual employment expectations.

***Educational Advancement.*** This study's findings that educational advancements are significant factors that enable veterans with service-linked PTSD to seek and retain employment is consistent with the existing body of literature (Griffin and Gilbert, 2015; Pellegrino and Hoggan, 2015; Reppert et al. (2014; Tollerson, 2018). Although these previous studies explored the transition into education, learning, and schooling, these studies rarely focused on the transition of combat veterans with service-linked PTSD into the workplace. While some veterans in the current study discussed the utilization of educational benefits (i.e., GI Bill) from some of the employment programs, others spoke on how pursuing another degree helped them become employable. Throughout most of the interviews, veterans expressed their desires for pursuing formal education outside the military because they wanted to be sure that after their transition; they would find employment suitable to their needs and wants. They shared how their education and degrees made them more employable in the civilian workforce. The findings of the current study was consistent with Griffin and Gilbert (2015), Pellegrino and Hoggan (2015), Reppert et al. (2014), and Tollerson (2018) in regards to education being an influential factor in veterans with service-linked PTSD seeking and retaining employment. While getting a college degree was most cited as an important aspect for veterans with service-linked PTSD seeking and retaining employment, no other specific

employment barriers were attributed to the loss of seeking or retaining employment in the civilian workforce by the study participants.

***Family and Friend Support.*** Veterans with service-linked PTSD having support from their friends and families were an important component for veterans seeking employment transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. This study's findings emphasized that having the appropriate amount of support is crucial for veterans with service-linked PTSD seeking employment, therefore experiencing this support from friends and family may impact how veterans view their transition from the military into the civilian workforce. Support seemed to be a big influence on the veterans' employability. Most of the participants discussed the support they received from friends and families. Some of the participants indicated that they received support from their friends and families, while others reported having little to no support while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. These findings were consistent with Senecal et al. (2019) who found that support is for a major part of the transition from the military to the civilian work force for veterans with service-linked PTSD. Many study participants acknowledged how important having support from their family and friends was to their transition from the military into the civilian workforce after leaving the military. Understanding the veterans' needs for family and friend support too, is aligned with previous literature that support is an influencer to seeking and retaining civilian employment (Senecal et al, 2019 and Debring et al, 2018). Participants expressed having sufficient support from their family and friends played a crucial role in their transition from the military into the civilian workforce after leaving the military.



*Expected to Make a Comfortable Living to Support Family.* In addition to having support from friends and family, veterans often mentioned that they expected to make a livable wage in order to comfortably support their family. This study's findings revealed that veterans were seeking employment that would be sufficient to care for their family. Previous research found that among males, employment for veterans showed opposition in regards to adequate employment in which they would receive a livable wage. The findings from this study revealed that veterans' believe that there is an apparent and increasing disadvantage against them in regards to finding suitable employment. Vick and Fontanella (2017) pointed to a bigger issue of veterans having concerns regarding their work skill sets not matching civilian employers wants and needs and how their PTSD diagnosis may present other significant barriers to gaining employment. Participants cited other barriers to finding and retaining employment in the civilian workforce as a veteran with service-linked PTSD transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. The participants in this study agreed that finding employment that would allow them to provide for their families was a priority for them while seeking employment. However, no previous studies were found to be associated with veterans' concerns with finding jobs that would make sufficient income to support their families. While Vick and Fontenella's (2017) study focused on the wages of veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars reintegration into the civilian workforce, the findings are applicable to helping contribute to the gap in literature as it relates to veterans with service-linked PTSD ability to find and retain employment in the civilian workforce by allowing them to financially provide a comfortable living for their families.

All the veterans in this study reported that they experienced difficulties in finding and maintaining employment due to medical issues resulting from their service linked PTSD diagnosis. The challenges encountered by these veterans influenced the process of gaining employment. A majority of the veterans believed that obtaining a degree or formal education would benefit them when seeking employment. Having the support of family and friends allowed them to more easily transition into the civilian workforce after leaving the military. The veterans revealed that finding employment that offered a livable wage to allow for the support of their families was of utmost importance.

Ultimately, the challenges that the veterans with service linked PTSD described reflected their lived experiences with finding and retaining employment after leaving the military. These challenges influenced their employability post military. Whether or not the veterans were able to overcome these challenges determined their ability to successfully transition from the military into the civilian workforce.

**RQ2. How do combat veterans with service-linked PTSD describe the type of support they received from employment programs in finding and retaining employment?**

Veterans with service-linked PTSD described the type of support they received from employment programs while seeking and retaining employment after leaving the military and transitioning into the civilian workforce. The most dominant themes that emerged were: (1) Scarcity of Employment Programs and services, (2) Type of Employment Programs, (3) Experience with Employment, (4) Services Received, and (5)

Recommendations. Veterans' responses indicated that the lack of employment programs and services had a major influence on seeking and retaining employment in the civilian workforce after leaving the military. Veterans discussed the types of employment programs they participated in and the results of these discussions appear to have confirmed that mandated programs or voluntary employment programs may influence their employability into the civilian workforce. Veterans' experiences were found to have impacted veterans with service-linked PTSD seeking or retaining employment in the civilian workforce positively or negatively depending on the individual. While some veterans reported that the employment programs were beneficial during their transition, others were dissatisfied with the outcome of the services they received from these programs. The study participants made recommendations to veterans who may utilize employment programs in the future while transitioning into the civilian workforce. Additionally, several recommendations for the improvement of the employment programs were discussed by the study participants. Some of these recommendations included were significant in order for these veterans to have the highest chance of retaining employment, receive the proper employment services, and also touched on how these employment programs can be improved in order to provide optimum employability for the veterans. As for the employment programs, veterans focused on their fellow veterans and the employment programs that assists veterans with service-linked PTSD that are utilized by these veterans after leaving the military in order to seek or retain employment in the civilian workforce.

All of the dominant themes that emerged from the data contributed to understanding the lived experiences of the study participants. Veterans with service-linked PTSD that utilized non-clinical employment programs transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce encountered first-hand. The sub themes that emerged provided insight into understanding the lived experiences of the study participants. The findings suggest that these dominant themes impact veterans with service-linked PTSD and their employability in the civilian workforce when seeking and retaining employment after leaving the military.

*Scarcity of Employment Programs and Services.* The veterans in this study reported that there was a lack of employment programs and services accessible to them when transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. They indicated that they had limited access to the few employment programs and services available to veterans with service-linked PTSD. There was a lack of employment programs and services for veterans seeking employment due to a variety of reasons.

Some of the participants discussed a lack of awareness or knowledge of the programs and services available to them post military while transitioning into the civilian workforce. In 2004, the Veteran's Health Administration (VHA) endured a nationwide implementation of Supported Employment (SE) with the goal of improving work outcomes in this special population of veterans. Despite these efforts, unsolved obstacles to employment success continue, as one third to one half of veterans remain unemployed despite receiving SE (Kukla et al., 2016).

Given the lack of awareness and availability of employment programs and services for veterans with service-linked PTSD, it is reasonable to suggest that these veterans display negative preconceived notions of employment programs and services due to a long history of poor veteran care management throughout the veteran affairs system. A few veterans cited the historical concerns between the VA and the availability of employment programs and services provided to veterans with service-linked PTSD that are reintegrating into the civilian workforce after the military. One veteran expressed his frustrations with the entire VA system that helps veterans with service-linked issues seek civilian employment, but also indicated that there are some positive changes that are gradually emerging. Multiple veterans expressed similar sentiments when talking about employment programs and services for veterans with service-linked PTSD leaving the military into the civilian workforce. The newer regulations and guidelines surrounding these employment programs for veterans with service-linked PTSD appear to be having a positive influence on veteran participation in these programs. Participants seemed optimistic with the new changes occurring in these employment programs that are geared towards helping veterans with service-linked PTSD transition from the military into the civilian workforce.

***Type of Employment Programs.*** The veterans with service-linked PTSD in this study utilized different types of employment programs. Veterans in this study talked about the different type of employment programs they participated in and the services they used in order to seek and retain employment while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. However, as previously stated not all of the veterans were

aware of the employment programs and services available to them while they were leaving the military. Some of the veterans spoke about how these programs and services provided to them were beneficial, while others indicated that they did not see any benefits from utilizing these employment programs and services in order to seek and retain employment. According to the VA website (VA, 2018b), commonly cited is a list of employment programs and resources related to helping veterans with service-linked PTSD seek and retain employment in the civilian workforce. Barnes (2019) provided a list that referenced to the VA's website for employment programs that assist veterans with PTSD find and retain civilian employment. In addition, the locations of these employment programs differ depending on the state in which the veteran utilizes the service or resource (DOL, 2018c; VA, 2018b). The participants in this study also talked about how some of the programs and services utilized were either mandatory or voluntary depending on the qualifications and their branch of service. None of studies in the previous literature talked about the types of employment programs utilized by the study participants. It is important to note that the VA's website talks about employment programs as well as provides non-VA programs, services and additional resources that are available for veterans with service-linked PTSD seeking civilian employment after leaving the military.

*Experiences with Employment Programs.* While the veterans with service-linked PTSD discussed their experiences with employment, after participating in employment programs, it is important to know that employment is a major priority among this group of veterans (Pease et al., 2016). Almost all of the study participants described their

experience with employment being difficult due to their service-linked PTSD. Their experiences with employment are consistent with past literature on the challenges that this population faces in seeking and retaining employment in the civilian workforce. Sripada et al., 2018 made reference to veterans with service-linked PTSD are more likely than those without service-linked PTSD to be unemployed, and unemployment is greater for those veterans with more severe cases of service-linked PTSD. This study's findings emphasize the importance of understanding and exploring the lived experiences that veterans with service-linked PTSD encountered with their employability and their actual employment experiences.

*Services Received.* The veterans in this study talked about the various types of supportive services that they received from the employment programs they utilized while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. Some of these services included resume writing, career counseling, and interviewing skills. The participants agreed that the services they received were useful when seeking employment, while other veterans felt that the services they received did not influence their employment decisions or employability. Previous studies (Barnes, 2019; Harrod, Miller, Henry, & Zivin, 2017; Wyse, Pogoda, Mastarone, Gilbert, & Carlson, 2018) also found that employment development and employment services following military service were important, especially for veterans with service-linked PTSD or other service-linked disabilities. The results in this study, pertaining to the services veterans with service-linked PTSD received, may suggest that employment programs and the services they provide to

veterans need some additional improvements in order to better meet the needs and wants of this population of veterans.

***Recommendations.*** During the interviews, veterans with service-linked PTSD provided some recommendations concerning what veterans who are transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce need in order to assist them in finding gainful employment. In addition, these participants also made recommendations for the employment programs and the services they provide for this particular population of veterans. The veterans in this study indicated that the programs and services provided to them could benefit from better transparency and awareness. Some veterans indicated that they were not even aware of the employment programs and services until it was too late for them to participate in or receive the benefits from the employment program. One recommendation that more than half of the veterans recommended was that veterans with service linked PTSD transitioning from the military should utilize the many VA services and programs offered to them. Half of the study participants recommended that employment programs and services utilized by veterans with service-linked PTSD transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce should tailor their services to better align with the individual veteran's needs and concerns. If the needs and concerns of veterans with service-linked PTSD who have participated in employment programs and services are important and are not being fulfilled to the satisfactions of this particular population, possibly it is time for an innovative approach to be taken in helping veterans with service-linked PTSD seek and retain employment in the civilian workforce.



### **Limitations of the study**

As previously discussed in Chapter 1, there are some limitations to consider with regards to this qualitative case study. First, this study did not include any female veterans. Female veterans were not included because women serving in combat roles are still very new in military culture. While women serving in combat roles are fairly new, it is important to explore and understand how female veterans are also impacted by the utilization of non-clinical employment programs as they are transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. Given this limitation, the findings from this study which focused on male combat veterans, cannot be used to reflect the lived experiences of female combat veterans who are transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce.

An additional limitation of this study is that the sample size was relatively small. Only eight male veterans with service-linked PTSD were recruited to participate in this research study. Due to this relatively small sample size, the findings of this study may not be reflective of all veterans with service-linked PTSD who have utilized employment programs or services while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. A larger sample size would have made it possible to generalize the findings to other service-linked PTSD combat veterans.

### **Recommendations**

There are two different categories of recommendations related to this study. First, the recommendations based on findings and second, the recommendations for future studies are discussed. Recommendations based on the findings center around providing

insight based on the veterans' points of view. Recommendations for future studies may add further insights into whether or not male veterans' experiences in seeking and retaining employment has changed in a particular number of years based on the suggested implemented changes.

***Recommendations based on findings.*** Based on statements from the veterans, the following five recommendations should be considered: (1) Veterans with service-linked PTSD should be mandated to attend military transition to civilian employment seminars and webinars; (2) Employment programs and services should provide efficient support to veterans with service-linked PTSD in a timely manner with the additional backing of the VA; (3) Employment programs that are geared towards veterans with service-linked PTSD should advertise; (4) Civilian career counseling for veterans with service-linked PTSD transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce should receive follow-up employment support and career counseling support alongside with military transition guidelines and policies should be created and published; (5) There should be mandatory monitoring from the VA (Employment programs) of all veterans with service-linked PTSD that have transitioned into the civilian workforce.

For recommendation the first recommendation, veterans attending mandated seminars and webinars will assist in enhancing their own understanding of the various employment programs and services available to them. This would ensure that all veterans have received information and are knowledgeable of the employment programs and services available to them during their transition from the military into the civilian workforce.

For the second recommendation, it is crucial for the employment programs and services to be provided in an efficient and reasonable time frame. For example, after veterans are released from the military, they will be monitored for a two to three-year time frame. Their employment efforts should be recorded and they should have mandated check-ins with a vocational specialist through the additional backing of the VA in order to demonstrate accountability for the well-being of veterans in the civilian workforce. Ensuring that these veterans have consistent follow-ups will guarantee that if any employment conflicts arise, the veterans will have the proper support from programs and services to assist them with their employment goals. Encouragement for veterans transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce seeking and retaining employment can add to the needed social and psychological support mechanisms.

Additional support provided to veterans can be social or psychological. For social support, these can include assistance from family or friends, allowing friends or family to listen to your feelings or give advice. For psychological support, these can include seeing a mental health counselor, a therapist or attending group support. These support mechanisms can help veterans with service-linked PTSD gain the integrity and ability needed in order to help them while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce.

In reference to the third recommendation number three, advertisements from employment programs detailing the services they provide to veterans with service-linked PTSD will bring more awareness to veterans of what is available to them. Hayden and Buzzetta (2014) mentioned that “Options knowledge is another important element when

working with veterans with disabilities on their career development because once information is gathered concerning options aligned with interests, expanding knowledge of options can be another important aspect of this process (p.58).”

For recommendation four, civilian geared career counseling, military transition guidelines and policies will permit veterans with service-linked PTSD with clear instructions on how to proceed with searching and retaining employment while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce.

Regarding recommendation five, the VA will be required to monitor these veterans who utilize employment programs which would allow the proper follow-up tracking and evaluation of the progress of these veterans in their civilian workforce employment activities. Mueller et al., (2019) reported that Sripada et al. (2018) discovered that 86% of veterans with PTSD endorsed an interest in using VA employment services, however only 14% had actually participated in services. This could help bridge the gap in communicating the need for veteran’s participation in employment programs and making veterans with service-linked PTSD aware of the employment programs available to assist them in seeking and retaining employment in the civilian workforce.

### **Recommendations for Future Studies**

There are three overall recommendations for future studies. First, it is recommended that future studies on employment programs consider a larger sample size that includes female veterans with service-linked PTSD that have participated in non-clinical employment programs while transitioning from the military into the civilian

workforce. Recruiting veterans both male and female could potentially bring about answers that could compare the similarities or differences amongst men and women veterans seeking civilian employment post military. Second, regarding sampling strategy, future studies should consider utilizing a probability sampling approach to ensure the generalization of the study findings (El-Marsi, 2017). El-Marsi (2017) suggests that the probability approach will minimize sampling errors linked to poor representative samples, especially considering a quantitative research study may be able to yield more mixed results than a qualitative study which may not be able to do so. Applying this sampling approach would be especially appropriate if the study was quantitative. El- Marsi (2017) also agrees that this approach can help minimize compromising the generalization of the study findings.

From a demographic perspective, this study lacked diversity in regards to race and ethnicity. Understanding how race can impact the employability of veterans with service-linked PTSD is important in understanding the barriers that veterans with service-linked PTSD also face when it comes to their employability. Six of the study participants were identified as African American or Black American and only two participants were identified as Caucasian or White American. According to Sayer et al., (2014) the Institute of Medicine (2010) reported that veterans of the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars are also more racially diverse than veterans of prior war eras, with only about 66% identified as being white compared, for example, with 90% of those deployed as part of the Vietnam War(IOM, 2010). Veterans with service-linked PTSD from all racial backgrounds face many challenges when seeking and retaining employment after leaving

the military. Understanding the challenges from a diverse population can help gain additional in-depth knowledge on how these challenges can be alleviated with the utilization of employment programs and services that assist veterans seeking employment across all races of veterans that serve in the military.

### **Implications**

This qualitative study has three major implications for veterans, the military and the employment programs. The implications are that veterans need to be aware and fully educated on these employment programs while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. The military needs to ensure that follow up methods and procedures are in place that will help keep track of the veterans that are utilizing employment programs for this special population of veterans. The military tracking these veterans will facilitate a better awareness of whether or not additional considerations and changes are needed in order to help this population find employment after leaving the military. The implications are that these employment programs that provide employment services and resources to veterans with service-linked PTSD while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce need to ensure that these programs are actually benefiting veterans when it comes to them finding and maintaining civilian employment. The social implications of veterans with service-linked PTSD attaining competitive employment are essential to the work-life transition and satisfaction of veterans leaving the military into the civilian workforce. The study findings answer the research questions and facilitated a deeper understanding of male veterans with service-linked PTSD that have utilized

employment programs and services transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce in order to seek and retain employment.

Additionally, the study findings have some important implications for both male veterans and non-clinical employment programs assisting veterans with service-linked PTSD seeking and retaining civilian employment. Civilian employers, employment programs and veterans with service-linked PTSD have the ability in helping to create a more innovative approach to assisting veterans become employable in the civilian workforce. The premise of these programs and services designed to assist veterans with service-linked PTSD transitioning into the civilian workforce indicates that new policies are needed to help create better non-clinical employment programs for this population of veterans entering the civilian workforce. This idea closely aligns with a study conducted by Smith (2014) which explored the relationship between disability and employment for veterans in order to prioritize issues to be addressed not only by rehabilitation services, but programs and policies focused on veterans. The results of this study suggest that employment programs and services utilized by veterans with service-linked PTSD seeking and retaining employment have yet to prove the ability to incite change in assisting veterans find or retain successful employment in the civilian workforce after leaving the military.

### **Conclusions**

The idea that the challenges that combat veterans with service-linked PTSD face with finding and retaining employment after leaving the military impacts their employability in this study. Also, some experiences with the type of support that combat

veterans with service-linked PTSD received from employment programs in finding and retaining employment appear to be consistent with the study findings. The results of this study revealed several dominant themes related to male combat veterans with service-linked PTSD that have participated in employment programs while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. These dominant themes that appeared to answer research question one were the following: (1) Medical Transition, (2) Challenges of Veterans Seeking Employment, (3) Educational Advancement, (4) Friends and Family Support, and (5) Expected to Make Comfortable living to Support Family. While participants in this study all had different experiences with utilizing employment programs in order to seek and retain employment after leaving the military, these dominant themes are significant elements in relation to their employability. Thus, it is clear that veterans with service-linked PTSD face a difficult challenge with transitioning back into the civilian workforce after leaving the military. Additionally, understanding the experiences of veterans with service-linked PTSD who have participated in employment programs that assist them in finding and retaining employment is an important part of the transition from the military into the civilian workforce. Participants in this study indicated that their family was a major priority when it comes to making decisions surrounding their employment choices and opportunities. Veterans with service-linked PTSD commonly stated having a difficult time while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce, particularly while seeking and retaining employment.



For the second research question, the following dominant themes emerged from the data: (1) Scarcity of Employment Programs and services, (2) Type of Employment Programs, (3) Experience with Employment, (4) Services Received, and (5) Recommendations. Participants' responses indicated that male veterans with service-linked PTSD leaving the military into the civilian workforce still face challenges when it comes to their employability. Participants in this study indicated that the lack of knowledge of available employment programs which assist veterans searching for civilian employment was a large hurdle to overcome. Lack of initiative taken from veterans also appeared to impact employment efforts after leaving the military. The types of employment programs that were utilized also play an important role in how veterans felt during their transition from the military into the civilian workforce. While some discussed the participation in the employment programs as beneficial, others mentioned gaining no real value by utilizing such programs. Based on the interviews with study participants, it is projected that understanding and exploring the lived experiences of veterans with service-linked PTSD that have utilized employment programs and their services while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce should be structured in a way that better meets the needs and wants of veterans seeking civilian employment. This could also contribute to understanding how the recommendations discussed by the study participants can contribute to a more educational and positive experience in seeking civilian employment after leaving the military.

Employment programs and services utilized by veterans provides some support to aid veterans with service-linked PTSD seeking and retaining civilian employment, while

other veterans with service-linked PTSD are still facing employment challenges after leaving the military and transitioning into the civilian workplace. Even with their participation in non-clinical employment programs, veterans with service-linked PTSD who have transitioned from the military into the civilian workforce after utilizing these employment programs and services, are not monitored closely or rarely received follow-ups on their employment efforts and advancements. If veterans are receiving services from these employment programs geared specifically for veterans with service-linked PTSD transitioning into the workforce, then it is imperative that the services being provided are efficient in terms of helping assist veterans with service-linked PTSD find civilian employment in a timely manner. Employment support and skill development are crucial for this unique population of veterans transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce.

In conclusion, the results of this study suggest that veterans with service-linked PTSD are a unique population that requires employment assistance while transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. Hopefully, civilian communities will be able to see how important it is for veterans with service-linked PTSD to be properly trained in order to allow for reintegration into the civilian workforce after leaving the military. The overwhelming facts of this study revealed that the military needs to create employment programs and services aimed specifically at meeting the individual wants and needs of veterans with service linked PTSD who are transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce in order to present realistic career opportunities and assistance for this special, and ever growing group of combat veterans.

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## Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

**Are You a Veteran with PTSD who Have used an Employment Program to Find Work?**

If you are between the ages of 25 and 60 years old, this study may be for you.



*JOIN in this Study!*

**Study Information:** The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of veterans with PTSD who have utilized employment programs to find and maintain successful employment.

**Are you eligible?**

1. Male
2. Between 25 to 60 years old
3. Served in Combat
4. Clinically diagnosed with PTSD
5. Served in Marine Corps, Air Force, Navy, Army
6. Received some service from an employment program or agency.

If you meet the requirements and you are interested contact:

Reina Cabbage

## Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

1. Please describe what your transition from the military into the civilian workplace was like?
2. How old were you when transitioned from the military into the civilian workforce?
3. Describe how your family and friends supported your transition from the military into the civilian workforce?
4. How did your serviced-linked PTSD diagnosis affect your transition from the military into the civilian workforce?
5. What kind of transition employment programs or services did the military provide you (if any)?
6. When were you diagnosed with service-linked PTSD?
7. What were your expectations for employment as you transitioned from the military to the civilian workforce?
8. How many employment programs, services or resources were you given towards helping you transition into the civilian workforce?
9. Can you share a specific challenge(s) you experienced participating in or utilizing employment programs or services specifically for veterans with service-linked PTSD?
10. How many employment programs did you participate in?
11. What employment programs and services specifically helped you the most or least?
12. What type of employment support did you specifically receive?
  - Was the employment support you received useful?
13. How have you coped with transitioning out of the military with service-linked PTSD into the civilian workforce?
14. Please describe the type of employment program you utilized to seek employment as you transitioned from the military into the civilian workforce.



15. Describe challenges you face as a veteran with serviced-linked PTSD seeking employment using non-clinical employment services.
  - How did you overcome these challenges?
16. What employment programs or services were the most valuable to you?
17. How do the services that you received enable you to find employment?
18. How do the services that you received enable you to maintain employment?
19. What advice would you provide to someone who is transitioning from the military with serviced-linked PTSD into the civilian workforce?
20. What advice would you give to employment programs and service providers for working with veterans with serviced-linked PTSD transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce in retaining employment?

## Appendix C: Recruitment Letter

**Recruitment E-mail:**

Dear [Insert Participant's Name],

My name is Reina Cabbage and I am a Doctoral student at Walden University in the Industrial/ Organizational Psychology Program. I am presently conducting qualitative research for a Doctoral degree and I need your help in participating in this important study. The topic being studied is the, "Lived Experience of Veterans with Service-Linked PTSD Utilizing Non-Clinical Employment Programs." You are invited to participate in this qualitative research study because you are a veteran with service-linked PTSD that has transitioned from the military into the civilian workforce. To participate in this study you must meet the following criteria:

1. Veteran
2. Served in one of the four primary branches of government; specifically, The U.S. Air force, 3.) U.S. Army, U. S. Navy or U.S. Marine Corps
3. Served in a combat zone or completed a tour of duty in a foreign war.
4. Have a service-linked PTSD diagnosis made by a health professional (e.g.,M.D., Psy.D., clinical social worker, etc.).
5. Participated in a non-clinical employment program or utilized an employment or vocational service specifically for veterans with a service-linked PTSD.
6. Complete an informed consent form acknowledging and indicating participation in the study was voluntary at own free will. (Form will be provided on the date of the interview).
7. Be a male

8. Be between the ages of 28-65 years old

A one-on-one semi-structured interview that will last no longer than 60 minutes will be conducted in order to describe your transition from the military to the civilian workforce by participating in or utilizing employment programs in order to seek or maintain employment, and how your experience as a veteran with service-linked PTSD affected this transition. You will have the right not respond to interview questions, stop the interview, and/or withdraw from the study at any time, The interview will take place in an agreed upon location, virtually or in person, such as a local community center, private library room or an approved place or location of your choice. You are encouraged to ask any questions, at any time, that will help you understand the study.

Your name or identity will be presented in the data or any reports that emerge from the study. No names will be attached to records or notes from the interview or observations. You will be assigned a pseudo name. All information will remain in locked files only accessible by me, the researcher.

If you are interested in participating in 111this study, please contact me or email me. Thank you!

Respectfully,

Reina Cubbage

Doctoral Candidate

Walden University: Industrial/Organizational Psychology

## Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study by Reina Cabbage and I am a Doctoral student Walden University in the Industrial/ Organizational Psychology Program. I am presently conducting qualitative research for a Doctoral degree and I need your help in participating in this important study. The topic being studied is the, “Lived Experience of Veterans with Service-Linked PTSD Utilizing Non-Clinical Employment Programs”. You are a participant who has been recruited for this qualitative research study because you are a veteran with service-linked PTSD that has transitioned from the military into the civilian workforce. The researcher is inviting you to participate in this study; however, you must meet the following criteria:

1. Veteran
2. Have a service-linked PTSD diagnosis made by a health professional (e.g., M.D., Psy.D., clinical social worker, etc.).
3. Participated in a non-clinical employment program or utilized an employment or vocational service specifically for veterans with service-linked PTSD.
4. Severed in a combat zone or completed a tour of duty in a foreign war.
5. Complete an informed consent form acknowledging and indicating participation in the study was voluntary at their free will. (Form will be provided on the date of the interview).
6. Be a male
7. Be between the ages of 28-65 years old
8. Served in one of the four primary branches of government. Specifically, The U.S. Air force, U.S. Army, U. S. Navy or U.S. Marine Corps to be in the study.

When not recruiting face-to-face, I obtained your name/contact info via a referral from other veterans with service-linked PTSD or social media, such as Facebook. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Reina Cabbage, who is a Doctoral student at Walden University.

### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to gain an in depth understanding of the unique challenges experienced by veterans with service-linked PTSD transitioning from the military into the civilian workplace while participating in or receiving services

from a non-clinical employment program. In addition, it is the purpose of this study to describe the services offered by these employment programs and vocational services offered to veterans with service-linked PTSD perceive as supportive to their employability.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- A one-on-one semi-structured interview that will last no longer than 60 minutes will be conducted in order to describe your transition from the military to the civilian workforce by participating in or utilizing employment programs in order to seek or maintain employment, and how your experience as a veteran with service-linked PTSD affected this transition.
- The interview will take place in an agreed upon location, virtually or in person, such as a local community center, private library room or an approved place or location of your choice.
- Service-linked PTSD veteran (Provide proof from medical record of an official service-linked PTSD diagnosis) A medical release form will be provided on the day of interview)
- Provide proof of military service. (For example, military ID or discharge of service papers)
- Be audio recorded.

Here are some sample questions:

1. What are some the challenges that combat veterans with service-linked PTSD have with finding and retaining employment after being deployed from the military?
2. What kind of transition employment programs or services did the military provide you (if any)?

**Follow up question:** How many employment programs, services or resources were you given towards helping you transition into the civilian workforce?

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This study is voluntary. You are free to accept or turn down the invitation. No one Walden University will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to be in the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time or refuse to participate in or may withdraw my participation from this study at any time without negative repercussions. Also, the researcher may stop the interview at any time. No information that identifies the participant will be released without distinct

consent and all identifiable information is confidential and protected to the parameters allowed by law. No names will be attached to records or notes from the interview or observations. You will be assigned a pseudo name. The data will not reference your name or identity. All information will remain in locked files only accessible by me, the researcher. If the research study design or the use of data is to be altered participants will be informed and my additional consent obtained.

### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as becoming upset or uncomfortable with questions related to service-linked PTSD and employment. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing. There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research study.

A Clinical Psychologist will be on call 24 hours and 7 days a week as a non-participating participant to guarantee the psychological safety of everyone, and that the interview protocol is being safeguarded and followed.

The potential benefit of this study to the participant is that the participants input may help add to the research regarding veterans with service-linked PTSD transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce. The findings will be available to me, the participant, at the conclusion of the study.

### **Payment:**

Participants will not be compensated financially for participation in this study.

### **Privacy:**

Reports coming out of this study will not share the identities of individual participants. Details that might identify participants, such as the location of the study, also will not be shared. The researcher will protect my identity and confidentiality by storing any research materials collected during the interview process in a locked and secured location in which only the researcher has access to. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purpose outside of this research project. Data were kept secure by the use of a fire safe located in an inaccessible location by that of only the researcher. Data were kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

### **Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher, Reina Cubbage. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call the Research Participant Advocate at my university at 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **06-25-19-0239584** and it expires on **June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020.**

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

**Obtaining Your Consent**

If you feel you understand the study well enough to make a decision about it, please indicate your consent by signing below.

Printed Name of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Consent \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature \_\_\_\_\_