

**Post-military Experiences of Veterans Affairs Canada Clients:
The Need for Military Release Readiness**

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Abstract

Post-military Experiences of Veterans Affairs Canada Clients: The Need for Retirement / Release Planning

This paper uses the VAC Canadian Forces Survey, a representative survey of clients of Veterans Affairs Canada conducted in 1999, and focuses on the need for post-release and/or retirement planning among clients (here called military release readiness). Previous analyses illustrated differing characteristics associated with medical, versus non-medical, release status, and then examined post-discharge employment and economic security of clients. Medical release status predicts disadvantaged economic position as well as feelings of insecurity for the ability to meet financial needs presently and into the future. Furthermore, research indicates that VAC clients report many barriers to post-release work-related training and continued education. This portrayal goes beyond the previous analyses, focusing on the need for planning prior to discharge, as only 60% of clients report making active plans for post-release civilian life. Planning is shown to be consequential for post-release economic well-being. This presentation should inform policy concerning the socioeconomic well-being of Canadian veterans, particularly in a military setting where release into civilian life is often unplanned due to illness or injury.

Evidence suggests that Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) clients are not adequately prepared for post-discharge careers. Although VAC and the Canadian Forces are collaborating in an attempt to create policy that will ease the transition from military to post-release experiences, clients are currently faced with a number of barriers to economic well-being. Specifically, although all clients of Veterans Affairs meet criteria for disability, medical release status (which is not a requirement for disability status) indicates an increased need for assistance upon release. Currently, reason for release from the military is not considered in policy decisions. Because release for medical reasons is most often unanticipated and occurs earlier in a client's military career than planned, we are now focusing on ways in which the Canadian Forces and Veterans Affairs Canada can work to improve the life situations of their clients. We consider "military release readiness" in the context of planning for retirement – or perhaps more importantly, unanticipated release from the military.¹ It is critical that military personnel are provided the opportunity and resources to prepare for the inevitability of retirement or the possibility of unforeseen release.

Retirement is a defining transition in life. "[D]uring a person's working years, personal identity tends to be closely associated with an occupational role. Working provides a sense of place in society, a sense of usefulness and purpose" (Shaw and Grubbs 1981: 42) Perhaps even more importantly, members of military services become even more integrated into the role of soldier. The benefits to membership in a military organization go beyond financial status: "The military, more than almost all other employers, structures into the careers of its soldiers ... continual opportunities for the acquisition of human capital." (Dowd 2000: 233) Unlike many other careers, military service offers security and a unique opportunity for upward mobility throughout membership. Within such a highly structured organization, military personnel are continually aware of "place" and "usefulness" to both the forces and society. However, although the military offers many benefits to soldiers, retirement from such a highly regimented occupation presents difficult challenges. "Soldiers leaving active duty after careers that last between twenty and thirty-five years are not only crossing over from the status of 'worker' to that of 'retiree,' they are also making what for some is the far more problematic shift from military to civilian life." (Dowd 2000: 236)

¹ Previous analyses have considered opportunities for continued education in work-related training programs upon release from the Canadian Forces; therefore, we will not focus on further education in this paper.

Further complicating the transition to civilian life for military retirees is the issue of gaining meaningful employment in the civilian labor force. “Although most military retirees [in America] work after leaving the service, many recent retirees are experiencing difficulty in finding employment.” (Snyder 1994: 581) Research cited by Snyder (1994) suggests that retired American military personnel face a number of differences in labor force experiences when compared to their civilian counterparts: (1) a five-year period of reduced income relative to civilians with comparable education; and, (2) a decreased wage after transition usually due to voluntary choice to work fewer hours or relocation to an area with lower wages. (Snyder 1994: 585-586) The importance of uncovering the resources for successful transition to civilian life becomes perhaps more important for VAC clients, all of whom are faced with some level of disability.

The evidence is quite strong that unexpected early retirement can have significantly adverse effects on people's income security. Canadian data suggest that early retirement has the most devastating consequences for income when retirement has been involuntary due to unemployment or for health reasons (McDonald, Donahue & Marshall 2000). Considering that over 30% of VAC clients were released for medical reasons, indicating compromised health, and for many, a lack of anticipation of retirement, a number of additional barriers may be present. It is therefore critical to understand how to best prepare military retirees for successful life outside of the Canadian Forces.

DATA AND MEASUREMENT

Sample

The data used for this analysis are from the Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) Canadian Forces Survey, a nationally representative survey of VAC clients conducted in 1999 as part of a study of veterans' care needs. Using a postal survey, the sample was restricted to VAC Canadian Forces clients currently residing in Canada who were aged 65 or less.² A total of 1855 valid questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 72%, and 113 questionnaires from the pilot

² The survey and preliminary analysis was conducted by Créatec+, a commercial survey research firm. The population base included 18,443 VAC clients, compiled through two data systems: the Benefits Delivery System, and the Pensions Status and Inquiry System.

study were added to the data for a total sample of 1968 respondents.³ All respondents meet the disability standards for eligibility for VAC benefits.

The original data cleaning process led to the deletion of 11 cases, three of which were respondents over the age of 65, and eight of whom reported “Appointment” status in the military. Furthermore, we chose to exclude female clients from the analysis (N=112). Since women in the Canadian Forces are likely to have different post-military career patterns and retirement planning issues than men, including them would potentially alter the findings and thus disallow generalizations to VAC male clients. Finally, because our interests concern post-discharge outcomes, we exclude from consideration VAC clients who are still serving in the Canadian Forces (N=279). The working sample for this analysis was limited to respondents who were not missing data on the primary variables of interest. The casewise deletion process led to a loss of 754 cases, yielding a final weighted sample of 819 respondents (N=812, unweighted), all of whom are male, aged 65 or less, and no longer serving in the Canadian Forces.⁴ All analyses utilize weighted data to account for the stratification variables employed in the sampling process; the weight variable accounts for province of residence, type of service, and age.⁵ The basic demographic characteristics of this sample, as well as variables describing Canadian Forces career experience, and post-release economic and employment situations have been discussed elsewhere, and so will not be repeated here.⁶

Variables

Many coding decisions were made that influence the basic data available to us. We conducted our own extensive data cleaning of the file, resulting in some discrepancies between our own and other internal reports prepared from the survey for Veterans Affairs Canada.

In the analyses, we focus on *military release readiness*, which is captured in two separate variables. The first variable captures timing of active preparation for retirement or release: “How

³ Of the initial survey questionnaires sent to clients (2760), 6% were in French (480) and the remainder in English (2280). In the attained sample, 15.9% of questionnaires were French language.

⁴ The majority of clients were excluded due to non-response on questions concerning income and employment history.

⁵ Type of service distinguishes Special Duty Area (SDA), Reserve, or Regular Forces. Any client receiving a disability pension for service in an SDA is coded as “SDA” regardless of any additional entitlement pensions. The remaining clients who were not receiving any SDA pensions were categorized as either “Regular” or “Reserve.”

⁶ For discussion of sample characteristics, please see: Marshall, Matteo, & Pedlar (2005), Prepared for Veterans Affairs Canada. Tables available upon request.

long before leaving the Canadian Forces did you begin to actively prepare for your retirement or release?" Responses were categorical: "Did not prepare" (N=322), "1-2 Years" (N=269), "3-5 Years" (N=113), "6-10 Years" (N=44), and "More than 10 Years" (N=70). For causal analysis, this variable was dichotomized into categories of "Did Not Prepare" (N=322) versus "Did Prepare" (N=497). The second measure of military release readiness is a variable that asks clients to check any number of preparations that were made for eventual retirement: (1) change in work pattern, (2) develop physical activities, (3) develop other leisure activities or hobbies, (4) gather retirement information, (5) contribute to an RRSP, (6) build up savings, (7) make other investments (including properties), (8) pay off or avoid debts, and /or (9) make major purchases. These items were considered separately within the descriptive analyses and as a count in causal analyses.

One additional question on the survey concerns military release readiness, but responses are limited to clients who report being released from the Canadian Forces earlier than planned (N=381). Specifically clients were asked: "Between the date you received official notification of your impending release from the Canadian Force to the official date of your release ... (a) did you feel you had sufficient time to prepare yourself from transition to civilian life, including locating a civilian job if that was your wish?; and (b) did you take any training/education courses in preparation for a second career?" These questions are considered only in the descriptive analyses.

Independent variables are grouped into a series of blocks: general characteristics (demographics), health status, and military career. In the causal analyses, blocks are entered according to hypothesized relationship to release/retirement planning. For instance, general characteristics, such as measures of human capital, are accrued throughout the life course and can be assumed to be present prior to the decision to prepare for eventual retirement. We then consider health to highlight the complexity and variability of VAC clients in terms of disability. Military career variables chronologically precede release from the Canadian Forces and therefore potentially predict a client's decision to prepare for eventual release.

General characteristics of interest include respondent age (range 20 - 65) and level of current education, coded as: "Secondary Diploma Not Completed," "Completed Secondary Diploma," "Some or Completed Post-Secondary Diploma," and "Completed Bachelor's or Post-Graduate Diploma." Marital status is also considered due to previous research that highlights the

importance of spousal influence on both the timing of and preparation for retirement. (Blau 1998; Gower 1998; Henretta, O'Rand & Chan 1993; Johnson & Favreault 2001; Marshall & Mueller 2002; Moen 2001). This variable is dichotomized into married (which includes responses of “married” and “living common law”) and not married (which includes responses of “separated/divorced,” “widowed,” and “never married”).

Health status measures include the global health indicator: “Compared to other people your age, would you say that in general your health is: excellent, good, fair, or poor?”⁷ The response categories were collapsed to create a dichotomous indicator: “Excellent / Good” or “Fair / Poor.” Another health measure we chose to include is medical release status (dichotomous): “Were you released from the Canadian Forces due to medical reasons?” This variable has been found to have profound effects on client economic well-being, and is also a marker of unanticipated release from military service (Marshall, Matteo & Pedlar, 2005).

Two diagnostic health variables are included in this analysis: post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. In previous analyses on this data, it was found that a considerable percentage of VAC clients express symptoms consistent with a diagnosis of either major depression or PTSD (Marshall, Matteo & Pedlar 2005). Furthermore, there is a high prevalence of comorbidity with these conditions. Respondents completed the PCL-M, a 17-item self-report rating scale for assessing the potential of PTSD.⁷ Consistent with Weathers and colleagues (1993), we classified respondents as symptomatic dependent upon DSM criteria (Method B) rather than cut-off scores. Therefore, respondents who reported “quite a bit” or “extreme” symptom experience on at least one Criteria B item (re-experiencing), three Criteria C items (avoidance/numbing), and two Criteria D items (hyperarousal) are considered cases of probable PTSD. Clients who meet the requisite for any two of these above criteria are classified as cases of subsyndromal PTSD. All other respondents are deemed as not having PTSD. In order to maximize response, we imputed data for all clients who were missing one or two items on the PCL-M scale (N=237; 12% of original dataset). Respondents were given the average value for their responses on the given Criteria for which data were missing. A similar imputing strategy was used for depression, which was measured by the CES-D 20-item scale. Consistent with Radloff (1977), clients with a total score of 16 or higher (range 0-60) are classified as potential

⁷ For a detailed discussion of the PCL-M and the CES-D as they relate specifically to this sample, please see G. J. G. Asmundson (2000).

cases of depression. We imputed data for all clients who were missing one or two items on the scale (N=171; 9% of original dataset). Respondents were given the average value of their responses on the scale.

Indicators of military career include age on date of release (range 17-63) and rank on date of release coded as: “Non-Commissioned Officer or Below,” “Junior or Subordinate Officer,” or “General, Flag, or Senior Officer.” Other indicators of military service, such as number of overseas deployments and element of service do not have a significant relationship to release/retirement planning, and were therefore dropped from the analyses.

A number of consequences of release/retirement planning are also considered: current income, perceived economic stability, current work status, and civilian work stability measures. We use total individual income from the previous year as the measure of current economic status. The data were collected as ordinal categories: “10,000 or Less,” to “80,000 or More” in \$10,000 increments, but due to the large number of categories and variability of data, this measure is used as continuous on some occasions. The measures for perceived economic stability include two questions concerning the adequacy of current income and investments to satisfy economic needs. In terms of present economic concerns, respondents were asked: “Do your current income and investments satisfy your needs?” Responses were dichotomized into categories of: “Yes” (N=431) and “No / Don’t Know” (N=357/29). Concern about continued economic stability was measured in terms of how well current economic position will accommodate future standard of living: “Do you anticipate your current income and investments will continue to satisfy your needs?” Again, responses were dichotomized into categories of: “Yes” (N=309) and “No / Don’t Know” (N=361/145). We chose to include a response of “Don’t Know” with the negative replies because we infer this implies a lack of confidence about financial security.

A measure of current employment status was created from a cross-tabulation of two questions from the original survey. Respondents were asked to indicate if they were “currently working for pay” or if they were “actively looking for a job.” Respondents currently working for pay were coded as “In the Civilian Labour Force.” Respondents actively looking for a job were coded as “Unemployed.” Finally, a respondent neither currently employed nor unemployed was coded as “Inactive.” There are potential limits to this measure due to uncertainty about whether “actively looking for a job” means unemployment or dissatisfaction with a current occupation,

but we suspect this is not a serious misrepresentation of the data. In terms of work stability, respondents were asked if they have ever worked for pay. Furthermore, we included indicators of unemployment since discharge from the Canadian Forces: “At any time since leaving the Canadian Forces, were you out of work and looking for a job in the paid labour force?” Respondents were also asked about the number of periods of unemployment experienced since discharge (range 0-11).

ANALYSIS

The goal of this analysis is to highlight the importance of preparedness for release from the Canadian Forces, whether it is a planned retirement or an unexpected discharge. We begin with a descriptive generalization of the associations between planning for release/retirement and demographic, health, and military service characteristics. Next, we focus on how the above relationships are predictive of VAC client preparedness for release from military service using logistic regressions (taken any steps to actively prepare for release) and ordinary least squares regressions (number of preparations made in anticipation of release). For the causal analyses, independent variables are entered in a series of blocks (nested models) to allow for comparison of models: demographic characteristics, health status, and military career. The final aspect of this paper focuses on potential consequences of release/retirement planning in terms of both economic well-being and financial security.

Planning for Retirement or Release: Descriptive Analyses

When asked specifically about active planning for release, 40% of VAC clients responded that they did not prepare at all, and only one-quarter (26%) began to prepare over two years before their release date. However, the survey also asked clients about specific adaptations that are often taken in an attempt to prepare for eventual retirement. Based upon this question, only 13.1% of respondents did not do any of the activities listed, which included adaptations such as financial planning and development of leisure activities. It is possible, that the adaptations listed may measure sound financial activity (such as avoiding debt), rather than actual retirement planning.

Many factors are associated with planning for retirement. These will be looked at specifically in the multivariate analyses. Patterns in retirement planning among medical and non-medical releases are highlighted here:

Table 1. List of Preparations for Retirement Made Prior to Release by Medical Release Status

	Medical Release	Non-Medical Release	Total		Medical Release	Non-Medical Release	Total
Contribute to RRSP ***	120 46.3%	374 67.1%	494 60.5%	Gather *** Information	103 40.1%	313 56.4%	416 51.2%
Build Up Savings ***	76 29.3%	224 40.7%	300 37.1%	Change Work Pattern	47 18.1%	104 18.7%	151 18.6%
Make * Investments (i.e. Property)	76 29.5%	213 38.4%	289 35.6%	Develop Physical Activities	34 13.1%	85 15.5%	119 14.7%
Pay Off or Avoid Debt	138 53.3%	314 56.8%	452 55.7%	Develop Leisure Activities	72 27.9%	171 30.9%	243 29.9%
Make Major Purchase	60 23.3%	133 24.2%	193 23.9%	Average *** Number of Adaptations (Range 0 – 9)	2.80	3.46	3.25

Note: Significance is based upon chi-square value for each individual adaptation and F-statistic for average number of adaptations. *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

As illustrated in Table 1, clients released for medical reasons are less prepared for their transition into civilian life. They are significantly less likely to have contributed to a RRSP, made investments, or otherwise built up savings for their retirement years. They are also, presumably, less knowledgeable about the economic situation they face, as they are less likely to have gathered information about retirement. It is a major policy concern that too few Canadians of any sort adequately prepare for the retirement year. The overall data for these VAC clients confirm the need for this concern, but the additional deficit in retirement preparation on the part of those released for medical reasons probably relates in part to the unanticipated nature of their departure from the service.

When asked specifically about “active planning” for retirement, 39.4% of VAC clients reported that they did not prepare at all. This question should be viewed in the context of the information in Table 1, and the finding that only 13.1% of respondents did not engage in any of the activities listed. This suggests that many of the activities there listed (and considered as such on the survey instrument) were simply considered good economic life planning, rather than retirement planning. Indeed, good economic planning in itself, such as avoiding debt, building up

savings and making investments, may be among the best approaches to retirement preparation even though retirement is not salient among the concerns of most persons active in the Canadian Forces. Again, clients released for medical reasons are at a significant disadvantage in terms of preparation for civilian life, as more than half (55.2%) of those released for medical reasons report no preparations were made prior to release (compared to 32% of those released for non-medical reasons). See Table 2. Furthermore, if a client did make preparations for retirement, it was most likely to occur in the 1-2 year period prior to release, which may not be ideal for any military retiree, regardless of release status. Transitioning out of the military includes not only the separation from a structured occupational organization, but also the shift into civilian life, which may be a new experience for many VAC clients who intended upon a lifetime military career.

Table 2. Timing of Active Preparation for Retirement / Release by Medical Release Status

<i>Timing of Active Preparation for Retirement/Release Prior to Leaving CF</i>	Medical Release	Non-Medical Release	Total
Did Not Prepare	179 32.0%	143 55.2%	322 39.4%
1-2 Years	200 35.8%	68 26.3%	268 32.8%
3-5 Years	91 16.3%	22 8.5%	113 13.8%
6-10 Years	35 6.3%	9 3.5%	44 5.4%
More Than 10 Years	54 9.7%	17 6.6%	71 8.7%
Total	559 100.0%	259 100.0%	818 100.0%

Chi-square 41.356*** tau-c -.213***

Clients who reported being released from the Canadian Forces earlier than they had planned (46.5% of respondents) were asked a series of questions about adaptations made between notification of release and official release date. (N=381) See Table 3.

Table 3. Adaptations Made between Notification of Release and Actual Release Date, for those reporting release earlier than planned, by Medical Release Status. (N and % represent “Yes” responses to each question.)

<i>Adaptations Made between Notification of Release and Actual Release Date:</i>	Medical Release	Non-Medical Release	Total ***
Client Had Sufficient Time to Prepare for Transition to Civilian Life (Including Locating a Civilian Job)	68 31.5%	106 64.2%	174 45.7%
Client Took Training / Education Courses in Preparation for Second (Civilian) Career	33 15.3%	46 28.2%	79 20.8%
Client Underwent Treatment as Part of Physical Rehabilitation Program	89 41.4%	26 16.0%	115 30.5%

Note: All adaptations are significantly different based upon medical release status at *** $p < .001$ based upon chi-square values.

This table highlights not only the fact that medical release places clients at risk for difficulties in shifting to civilian life, but also that all VAC clients face potential barriers to a successful transition. For instance, regardless of reason for release, 45.7% of all clients who are released early (or about one-quarter of all VAC clients) feel they did not have sufficient time to prepare for the transition to civilian life. It is possible, as well, that this number would be higher, but the question was not asked of clients who felt they were released from the CF or retired in an expected time frame. Although clients who felt they were released earlier than planned were more likely to be medically discharged (57% of those released early), a large portion of VAC clients are voluntarily released or discharged for non-medical reasons.

Interestingly, 41.4% of clients released for medical reasons (who were released earlier than planned) did complete a physical rehabilitation treatment program. The availability of such services is without a doubt helpful in preparation for release.

Predictors of Retirement / Release Planning (Causal Analyses)

We turn now to a multivariate analysis of the data, to develop a causal analysis identifying the factors associated with greater or less planning for retirement. The analyses are presented in six regression models (three for each major dependent variable), in Tables 4 and 5.

Demographic Factors:⁸

Before examining these models, we note the way in which we dealt with age. In a simple bivariate analysis, we find that older clients are more likely to actively prepare for release, but this relationship is marginal. Furthermore, in the analyses we conduct, the relationship between age and preparation for retirement presents multicollinearity problems when age at time of release is introduced. We consider age at time of release to be a more salient factor than age itself, as an influence on post-release economic status. Therefore, for this analysis, age at time of release is considered in order to allow for speculation about likelihood of “retirement” upon release from the Canadian Forces, following the assumption that clients who are released at a later age are more likely to transition into retirement rather than employment in the civilian labor force.

We can now turn to the three models presented in Table 4, which examine a number of factors simultaneously, using logistic regression, to assess their impact on whether VAC clients actively prepare for retirement. Model 1 includes only the demographic variables, marital status, education and income as predictors of retirement preparation. Comparing this model to Model 2 shows how any effects detected in Model 1 might be mediated by the consideration of additional health factors. Model 3 brings in the additional complexity of considering how all of the factors considered in Models 1 and 2 might be conditioned by rank and age, on the date of a client's release from the Canadian Forces. The same nested models are used in Table 5, where we examine the effects of same predictor variables on a count of the total number of adaptations made prior to release using ordinary least squares regression.

Marital Status and Education:

Marital Status: Clients who are married (or in a common-law arrangement) are significantly more likely to actively prepared for release from the Canadian Forces. Specifically, married clients are twice as likely to report preparing for release, but this relationship is mediated by

⁸ Although income is considered a demographic factor, this variable is not included in regression analyses. The relationship between retirement planning and income will be discussed in the next section because of the difficulty presented by using cross-sectional data. Because it is impossible to ascertain client's income at time of planning for release, we assume income is an outcome rather than a predictor of preparations made for retirement.

military service factors (Table 4). When considering the number of retirement adaptations, no significant difference exists between married and non-married clients (Table 5).

Education: Considering only models 1 and 2 in Table 4, we see that clients who obtain secondary education are more likely to plan for release from the Canadian Forces. When controlling for health and military career characteristics (Table 4, Model 3), the effect of completing secondary education is no longer discernible. Attaining a post-secondary diploma or at least some diploma education is associated with a 68% greater likelihood of having planned for retirement, and completion of at least a bachelor's degree is associated with a 138% increase in the likelihood of having planned for retirement. In terms of the number of adaptations made, there is an increase in preparations as education increases, but this relationship is not significant in all cases. (See Table 5.) For instance, when compared to those who did not complete a secondary diploma, only those who attempted post-secondary education are significantly more likely to have performed a higher number of adaptations. This may simply be a more proactive educational-attainment group, or it may be that a baseline of education is necessary, or supportive, of what some psychologists call self-efficacy (Bandura 1997) and some life course theorists call 'planful competence' (Clausen 1993). Gecas (2003) notes that people differ as early as adolescence in feelings of self-efficacy and self confidence. This can be associated with earlier educational attainment, and also reinforced by success at that level. Based on extensive interview data with US Army generals approaching retirement, Dowd (2001) identifies a similar construct, a 'realizing spirit', or "these offers' sense of personal efficacy that is coupled with a faith or belief in the legitimacy and worth of the organization to which they belong". He sees this realizing spirit as nurtured by the organizational demands of the officer career.

Health Status:

General Health: Clients who are in better health are more likely to have prepared for release from the Canadian Forces, and this relationship is significant when considering both active preparation and the number of adaptations made. Specifically, clients who report their health to be either good or excellent are 55% to 63% more likely to plan for retirement when controlling for other factors (Table 4, Models 2 and 3). Also consider that clients who are released for medical reasons are significantly less likely to report preparedness for release. Although this relationship is significant (Table 4, Model 2), it is mediated by military service characteristics

(Table 4, Model 3). This highlights the fact that clients who are released for medical reasons are in jeopardy of economic difficulties upon release due to early and unexpected discharge as well as a health status that is compromised even when compared to VAC client counterparts who were not released for medical reasons. Maintaining military status is protective of both economic status and eventual preparedness for transitioning into civilian life.

PTSD and Depression: PTSD, whether subthreshold or probable, does not significantly affect planning for release from the Canadian Forces, or the number of preparations made for retirement (Tables 4 and 5). This lack of statistical significance may be due to the cross-sectional nature of the data (Marshall 2005). Because we cannot ascertain timing of PTSD diagnosis (particularly in terms of whether or not this diagnosis was the cause for release from military service), it is unreasonable to assume that this relationship is not important. On average, clients who present symptoms consistent with subthreshold PTSD or probably PTSD are younger at time of release than their counterparts who do not meet the criteria for such categorization.

Clients who present symptoms consistent with a diagnosis of depression are significantly less likely to have made preparations for release. Specifically, if a client reports symptoms consistent with a diagnosis of depression, he is between 49% and 40% less likely to prepare for military release (Table 4, Models 2 and 3). Again, causation is questionable due to data restrictions, but the relationship remains important for policy decisions, as it highlights the additional needs of clients suffering from mental health conditions.

Table 4. Logistic Regression of Active Preparation for Release / Retirement from the Canadian Forces on Demographics, Health, and Military Career Characteristics of VAC Client Sample (N=819)^a

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>
<i>Demographics</i>			
Marital Status (1=Married)	2.124*** (.459)	2.060*** (.466)	1.627 (.413)
Current Education (Secondary Not Completed)			
Completed Secondary Diploma	1.678** (.380)	1.700* (.406)	1.638 (.417)
Some/Completed Post-Secondary Diploma	1.273 (.249)	1.356 (.278)	1.679* (.370)
Completed Bachelor's/Post-Graduate Diploma	1.316 (.428)	1.410 (.459)	2.378* (.920)
Income	1.150** (.052)	1.071 (.048)	1.004 (.052)
<i>Health</i>			
Current Health (1=Good/Excellent)		1.547** (.259)	1.632** (.299)
PTSD (None)			
Subthreshold PTSD		1.156 (.348)	1.080 (.352)
Probable PTSD		1.067 (.298)	.908 (.274)
Depression (1=Yes)		.515** (.117)	.605* (.149)
Medical Release Status (1=Yes)		.501*** (.086)	.723 (.132)
<i>Military Career</i>			
Rank on Date of Release (Non-Commissioned Officer or Below)			
Junior/Subordinate Officer			.491** (.128)
General/Flag/Senior Officer			.729 (.235)
Age on Date of Release			1.098*** (.011)
-2 Log Likelihood	1052.314	998.105	893.493
^a Sample data are weighted and limited to male respondents who are age 65 or less and no longer actively serving in the Canadian Forces.			
* p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001			
Note: Odds ratios are presented (their standard errors are in parentheses).			

Table 5. OLS Regression of Number of Preparations Made for Release or Retirement from the Canadian Forces on Demographics, Health, and Military Career Characteristics of VAC Client Sample (N=819)^a

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>
<i>Demographics</i>			
Marital Status (1=Married)	.283 (.223)	.230 (.221)	.007 (.216)
Current Education (Secondary Not Completed)			
Completed Secondary Diploma	.444 (.229)	.435 (.225)	.365 (.219)
Some/Completed Post-Secondary Diploma	.542** (.202)	.565** (.199)	.648*** (.194)
Completed Bachelor's/Post-Graduate Diploma	.484 (.321)	.503 (.316)	.590 (.328)
Income	.202*** (.043)	.145*** (.044)	.075 (.045)
<i>Health</i>			
Current Health (1=Good/Excellent)		.542*** (.162)	.516*** (.157)
PTSD (None)			
Subthreshold PTSD		.361 (.277)	.257 (.270)
Probable PTSD		-.093 (.285)	-.159 (.276)
Depression (1=Yes)		-.561* (.221)	-.368 (.216)
Medical Release Status (1=Yes)		-.285 (.168)	.016 (.168)
<i>Military Career</i>			
Rank on Date of Release (Non-Commissioned Officer or Below)			
Junior/Subordinate Officer			.119 (.216)
General/Flag/Senior Officer			.217 (.260)
Age on Date of Release			.057*** (.008)
Constant	1.748 (.278)	1.954 (.306)	-.059 (.422)
R ²	.049	.093	.152

^a Sample data are weighted and limited to male respondents who are age 65 or less and no longer actively serving in the Canadian Forces.

* p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

Note: Coefficients are unstandardized regression weights (their standard errors are in parentheses).

Military Service:

Age at Time of Release: Clients who are older at time of release are significantly more likely to have actively prepared for their transition into civilian life, whether they choose to retire or join the civilian labor force. However, the relationship (whether to report any planning or the number of adaptations made) does not present overwhelming benefits to being released at a later age. For instance, for each year older a client is at time of release, he is only 1% more likely to have made preparations. (See Table 4.) Therefore, it is important that planning for release and for retirement begin early in one's military career.

Rank: Junior / Subordinate officers are significantly less likely to prepare for release when compared to Non-Commissioned Officers. They would on average also be younger and this might account in part for that difference. Furthermore, those of highest rank are less likely, although not statistically significant, to take active steps to prepared for release. This may be because they are more likely to view their life in the military as a career lasting until retirement, and one that also carries inherent retirement preparation implications such as wealth and pension accumulation, as well as the development of a psychological approach to life such as Dowd (2001) describes in the generals he studied.

Benefits of Retirement or Release Planning

To this point we have described the variability we found in planning for release and the extent to which a client of Veterans Affairs Canada reports having prepared for retirement. We also described several factors associated with this variability. We are now ready to examine whether retirement and release planning is beneficial in terms of the veteran's subsequent economic status.

Preparation Increases Economic Well-Being

We found no significant differences in the current employment status of clients who did or did not prepare for release. We did find that those who actively prepared for release and retirement are significantly less likely to have ever been in the civilian labor force (85% versus 91%; $p < .01$); however, this relationship is mediated by age at time of release. (Clients released at a later age are significantly less likely to ever become employed in the civilian labor force, and

when controlling for this, preparation for release becomes nonsignificant.) This suggests that clients who become “inactive” upon release from the Canadian Forces are not necessarily taking steps to prepare for retirement. Among clients who report their current status as “inactive,” 40% did not actively prepare for release / retirement. Due to the limitations of this survey, in that it was not longitudinal, it is difficult to be certain whether or not clients intended to retire prior to release or upon release. Furthermore, clients who report being “inactive” have been released from the Canadian Forces for, on average, 14 years; and, 69% of these clients report having been in the paid labor force at some point since release.

Those who actively prepared for release or retirement are significantly less likely to have ever been unemployed (40% versus 51%; $p < .01$). This relationship remains even when considering only clients who were at some point employed in the civilian labor force.

Regardless of employment status, clients who actively prepared for release have significantly higher incomes than their counterparts who did not plan ahead. Specifically, clients with higher incomes are more likely to have contributed to an RRSP, build savings, make other investments and avoid debts. It is impossible to untangle the causality between income and retirement planning without longitudinal data, but there is some evidence to suggest that overall planning for retirement leads to better income: Clients with higher incomes are significantly more likely to have developed physical activities prior to release as well as to have gathered information about retirement. Although we cannot discern whether planning leads to higher incomes or vice versa, it is possible from these data to conclude that clients who report higher incomes at the time of survey participated in retirement planning beyond finance management. Furthermore, the more income a client reports, the more comprehensive their planning was prior to release (an average of 2.5 preparations for clients earning less than \$20,000 compared to more than 4 preparations for those earning more than \$60,000, $p < .001$).

Preparation Increases the Sense of Economic Security

Whether or not clients plan to work in the civilian labor force or retire upon release from the Canadian Forces, it is important to consider how planning for release from military service can effect their perceptions of financial security.

Table 6. Ability to Meet Current Needs by Active Preparation for Military Release.

Current Income & Investments Meet Needs	Did Not Prepare for Release	Actively Prepared for Release	<i>Total</i>
No / Don't Know	180 56.1%	206 41.5%	386 47.2%
Yes	141 43.9%	290 58.5%	431 52.8%
<i>Total</i>	321 100.0%	496 100.0%	817 100.0%

*Chi-square 16.536*** tau-b .142****

The above table (Table 6) illustrates that clients who did not actively prepare for release are significantly less likely to feel that their current income and investments meet their needs. Whether this factor is due to unexpected release, or a lack of preparation for civilian life (whether as a member of the paid labor force or a retiree), is unclear. However, over half of client who did prepare feel secure in their present economic situation.

Unfortunately, fewer than half of all clients feel they will be financially secure into the future, but this situation is worsened if a client did not actively prepare for release (Table 7). Only 29.7% of clients who did not prepare for retirement or release feel they will be able to meet their needs into the future, compared to 43.3% of those who reported some level of “active” preparation. When considering the timing of preparation, clients are more likely to feel secure the longer in advance they prepared: 1-2 years 39.9%; 3-5 years 46.0%; 6-10 years 56.8%.

Table 7. Perception of Continued Ability to Meet Financial Needs by Active Preparation for Military Release.

Current Income & Investments Will Continue to Meet Needs	Did Not Prepare for Release	Actively Prepared for Release	<i>Total</i>
No / Don't Know	225 70.3%	280 56.7%	505 62.0%
Yes	95 29.7%	214 43.3%	309 38.0%
<i>Total</i>	320 100.0%	494 100.0%	814 100.0%

*Chi-square 15.325*** tau-b .137****

CONCLUSIONS

We focused on *military release readiness*, measured in two ways. The first relies on the single indicator, "How long before leaving the Canadian Forces did you begin to actively prepare for retirement or release?", and contrasts those who say then "did not prepare" with all others. The second relies on a checklist of eight activities taken as preparation for retirement. In addition, for only those reported being released from the Canadian Forces earlier than planned, we have data on whether they felt they had sufficient time to prepare for transition to civilian life. We examined a number of factors that might be associated with military release readiness. We found little readiness, and less in those medically released than in those with a non-medical release (who would nonetheless have a disability qualifying them for Veterans Affairs Canada client status). Older, married, and more highly educated respondents are likely to be more prepared than younger, not married and lowly educated veterans. Controlling for other factors, clients whose health is better are more likely to have planned for retirement, leaving the implication that those who could benefit most from advance planning are least likely to have taken a planful approach.

Given strong current interest in PTSD and mental health, we examined the relationship of PTSD depression to readiness for release. PTSD status had no association with readiness, but as we noted, the cross-sectional nature of the survey might have obscured a relationship. We did find depressive symptomatology to be strongly associated with readiness. Those who present symptoms consistent with depression were much less well prepared for release. While it is not

clear from these cross-sectional data whether depression triggered the medical release, followed from it, or both, it is clear that mental health conditions are important for Veterans Affairs Canada clients.

We next asked whether military release readiness is associated with subsequent economic conditions, as measured by employment status, income, and feelings of economic security. Employment status was not associated with whether one had actively prepared for retirement or release. However, those who actively prepared for release or retirement are more likely to report higher incomes than those who did not plan ahead. Clients reporting higher incomes at the time of the survey are significantly more likely to have done advanced planning beyond finance management and to report more specific planning activities on the checklist question. This suggests that a comprehensive approach to retirement and release planning should go well beyond financial planning.

An important general finding of this survey is that fewer than half of the Veterans Affairs Canada clients feel that they will be financially secure in their future. However, those who actively prepare for retirement or release are also more likely to say that their current income and investment meets their needs than those who have not planned. Clients are also more likely to feel secure if they planned longer in advance, prior to release.

Adaptation following release from the Canadian Forces can only roughly be considered as akin to retirement, as least for the clients of Veterans Affairs Canada. The mean age at time of release from the Canadian Forces, of the VAC clients under consideration here, is 40.3 years (standard deviation 9.92). That approximately one-third of clients who left the forces on a medical release was just 36.1 years (standard deviation 9.46). The oldest client at release was 63, and the oldest discharged for medical reasons was 55. The mean age of all clients at the time of the survey was 52.3, and of those medically discharged was 48.0 years. (see Marshall, Matteo & Pedlar 2005). Thus, our concern has been with people whose age profile does not fit that of most Canadians who retire. These differences highlight the fact that retirement and retirement planning was not salient in most of the clients. Many may have anticipated continuing their careers in the service until reaching the statutory age for discharge. Many others may well have anticipated leaving the service prior to that age but subsequently remaining in the paid labor force. Instead, health problems and disability led to life changes for which most were little prepared.

In summary, despite the difficulties in establishing causality from this cross-sectional survey, the data make us confident in asserting that there is a great need for steps to be taken to enhance economic security after release from the Canadian Forces, and that a broadly based approach to enhance military release readiness would likely pay off handsomely to enhance the well-being of Veterans Affairs Canada clients. Such an approach should emphasize the possibility that active military service can be abruptly ended. Long range career or life planning is always a good thing (Reitzes, Mutran, & Fernandez 1998), but for those in the armed forces, there should be contingency planning in 'what-if?' scenarios leading to early and unanticipated discharge for medical reasons.

Potential Limitations

This analysis, as is typical of most secondary analyses, has been limited by measurement choices that were not made with our specific focus in mind. Some problems with the format of the survey questionnaire most likely increased the extent of missing data, and may have influenced the validity of some responses in ways we cannot define. Nevertheless, the survey provides a unique opportunity to examine factors associated with differential income security outcomes among Canadian Forces clients of Veterans Affairs Canada. The main limitation of this study is its cross-sectional nature. The Canadian Forces are currently considering initiating longitudinal surveys of armed forces personnel. These would be invaluable to sort out the complex causal pathways we have been exploring, particularly in tracing the sequence of planning for release/retirement, discharge from military service, and transition into civilian life. Any longitudinal survey to be developed should ideally be done so in collaboration with Veterans Affairs Canada, which has primary responsibility for the health needs of Canadian veterans, as well as a historic mandated interest in their economic security.

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