

Veteran Reintegration Program

Analytic Report July 14, 2021



Veterans Reintegration Survey Results on Veteran Reintegration Experiences, Social Stigma, and Support Networks

About the Series

The Veterans' Reintegration Survey (VRS) explored veterans' general experiences as they transition from military service due to the ongoing conflict that began in 2014. The topical areas in the VRS include veterans' service experience, healthcare, employment, well-being, and sociopolitical perspectives.

This report discusses key findings from data collected regarding veterans' reintegration experiences and perceptions as well as civilians' perceptions toward veterans and key issues that affect them.¹

Key takeaways:

- More than half (60%) of non-active-duty veterans have experienced at least some difficulty in their transition into civilian life.
- Veterans have established strong relationships with fellow veterans as a result of their experiences in the ongoing conflict, and these relationships remain strong after their military service.

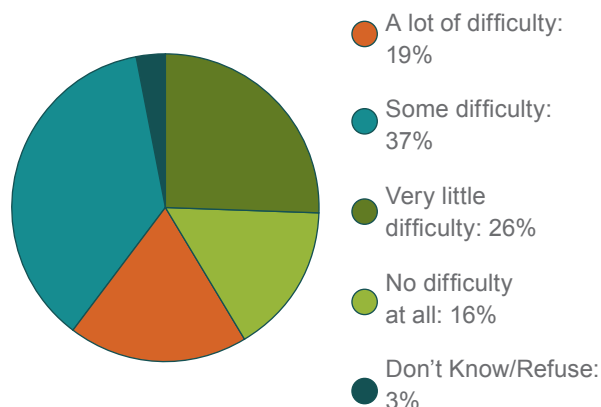
Policy Recommendations

- Provide holistic reintegration programs that address veterans' multiple levels of exclusion from society (lack of employment, mental health challenges, healthcare needs, etc.). Engage grassroots organizations and veteran leaders to work together to successfully implement reintegration efforts.
- Promote the positive image of veterans through nationwide campaigns showcasing personal stories of veterans and portraying them as reliable members of the community.

Over Half of Veterans Experience Difficulty in Reintegration

Figure 1 presents veterans' perceptions of reintegration into civilian life: 42% of respondents experienced little or no difficulties, while 56% experienced some or a lot of difficulty. Almost one in five veterans has experienced a lot of difficulty in their reintegration phase into civilian life. In addition, there are significant differences

Figure 1. Veterans' Perceptions on Reintegrating Into Civilian Life



¹ Given that veterans were sampled using the snowball approach, the sample of veterans is likely better connected to the NGOs and other veterans than the overall veteran population, which may skew some of the results of the survey.

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es between active-duty and non-active-duty veterans: 39% of active-duty veterans expressed a lot or some difficulty reintegrating compared to 60% of non-active-duty veterans.

Family and community relationships

Figure 2 shows the veterans' responses about family relationships before and after their service: 43% of veterans stated that their relationships had not changed, and 55% experienced some form of change. Among veterans who experienced changes, 34% stated that their family relationships had somewhat or significantly improved; 21%, somewhat or significantly worsened.

Figure 3 shows veterans' responses about community relationships before and after their service. Nearly 60% of veterans stated that their relationships remained the same, while 36% experienced some form of change. Among that 36%, positive and negative shifts were almost the same, in that relationships somewhat improved for 14% and somewhat worsened for 16%. Similarly, 3% of veterans stated that their community relationships had significantly improved, while the same percentage said that their relationships had significantly worsened. Additionally, 43% of veterans reported having fewer civilian friends than before they served, 39% had the same amount, and 16% had more civilian friends.

Communication with fellow veterans

Even after the conclusion of their service, most veterans still maintained relationships with each other, communicating in-person or virtually (e.g., phone, internet). Figure 4 shows that nearly half of respondents communicated with fellow veterans every day, and one-third were

Figure 2. Veterans' Feedback on Family Relationship Changes Before and After Service

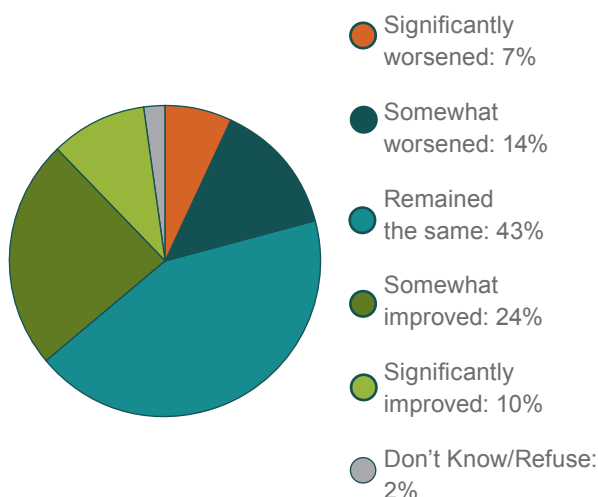


Figure 3. Veterans' Feedback on Community Relationship Changes Before and After Service

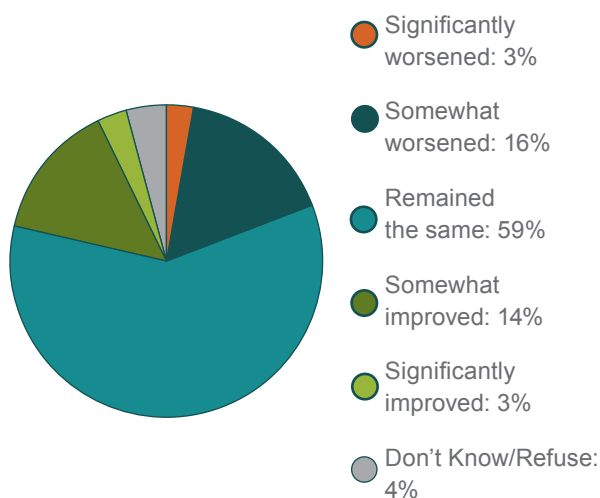
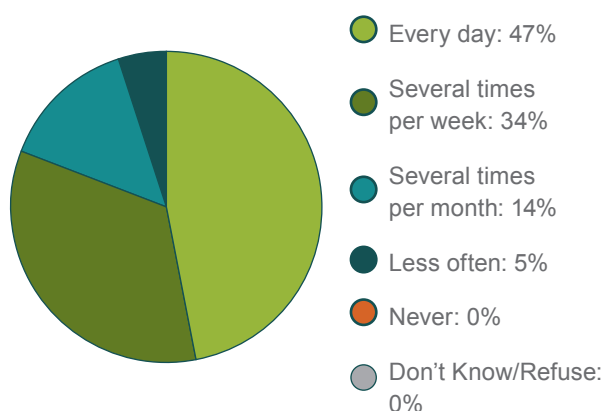


Figure 4: Veterans' Frequency of Communicating with Fellow Veterans



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in touch several times a week. Only 5% were communicating minimally with their fellow veterans. Among active-duty veterans, 59% communicated every day with fellow veterans; while 44% of non-active-duty veterans did so.

Veterans' Perceptions of Civilians' Attitudes toward Them

Most veterans feel that the general public either respects them or is neutral (*Figure 5*). The largest share (41%) of veterans stated that they have been neither respected nor disrespected; 6% of veterans said they have received a great amount of respect, and 38% have received some respect. Only 11% of veterans perceived that they have been somewhat or greatly disrespected by the general public.

Regarding whether veterans think that civilians understand the challenges they faced after returning from conflict, almost two-thirds of veterans felt that only a minority of civilians understand the challenges they face, and 22% felt that no civilians understand (*Figure 6*). Only 10% of veterans felt that the majority of civilians understand their challenges, and only 1% stated that all civilians understand.

VRS results indicate some differences between active-duty and non-active-duty veterans in perceived discrimination and harassment. Among active-duty veterans, 61% reported not experiencing harassment or discrimination due to their veteran status compared to 46% of non-active-duty veterans. Conversely, 36% of non-active-duty veterans reported experiences of harassment and discrimination from strangers compared to 24% among active-duty veterans. More non-active-duty vet-

Figure 5: Veterans' Feedback on Public's Interaction with Them

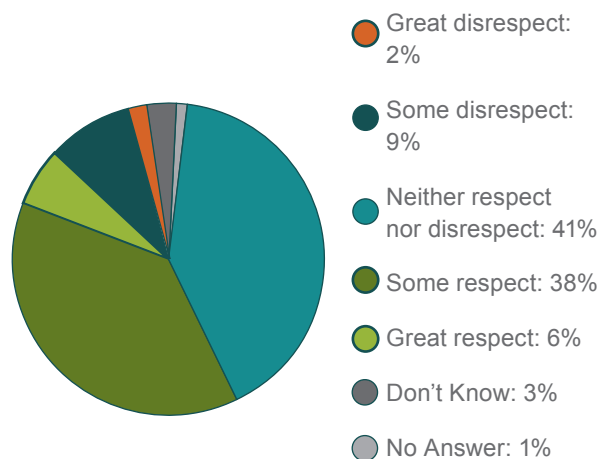
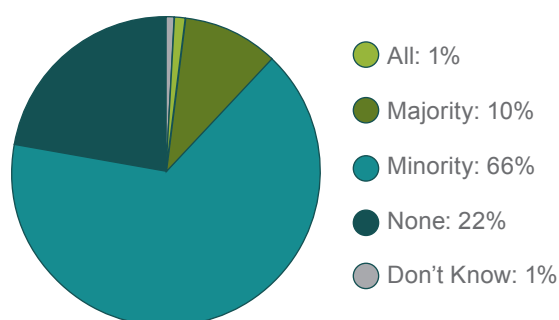


Figure 6: Veterans' Perceptions on How Many Civilians Understand the Challenges They Face Returning from the Conflict



erans (7%) reported experiences of harassment and discrimination from potential employers than non-active-duty veterans (3%). A similar outcome holds for harassment and discrimination experiences from civilian friends, where 8% of non-active-duty veterans stated having these experiences compared to 4% of active-duty veterans.

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Civilians' Perception of Veterans

Over half of the general public respondents (55%) have a relationship with at least one veteran (Figure 7). The most common relationship they have with veterans is as an acquaintance (29%). Less than one-fifth stated

having veterans as friends, and 12% have veterans as neighbors.

The vast majority of civilians have respect for veterans: 64% stated having great respect for veterans and 22%, some respect. Only 1% said they had some disrespect, and another 1%, great disrespect (Figure 8).

Figure 7: Nonveterans Reporting Relationships with Veterans, (%)

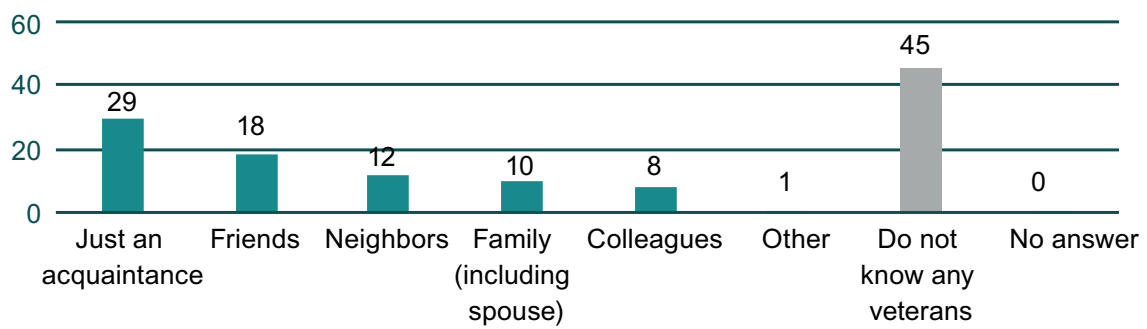


Figure 9 shows the public's perceptions on how much veterans should receive certain benefits compared to the average civilian. Most of the respondents showed a willingness to give more benefits to veterans, particularly in the area of healthcare. Over half (60%) of respondents stated that veterans should get much more mental healthcare benefits, while 28% stated that they should get a little bit more. Regarding physical

Figure 8: Respondents' General Perceptions of Veterans

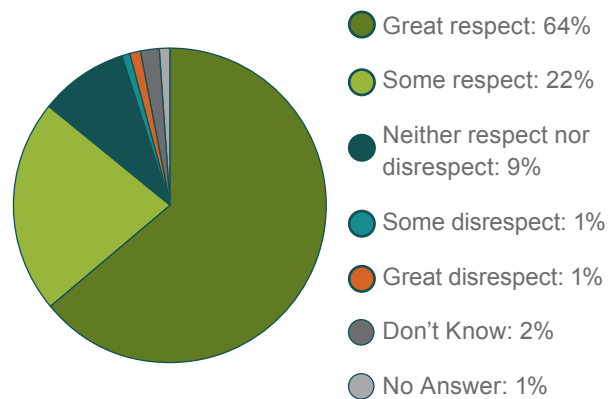
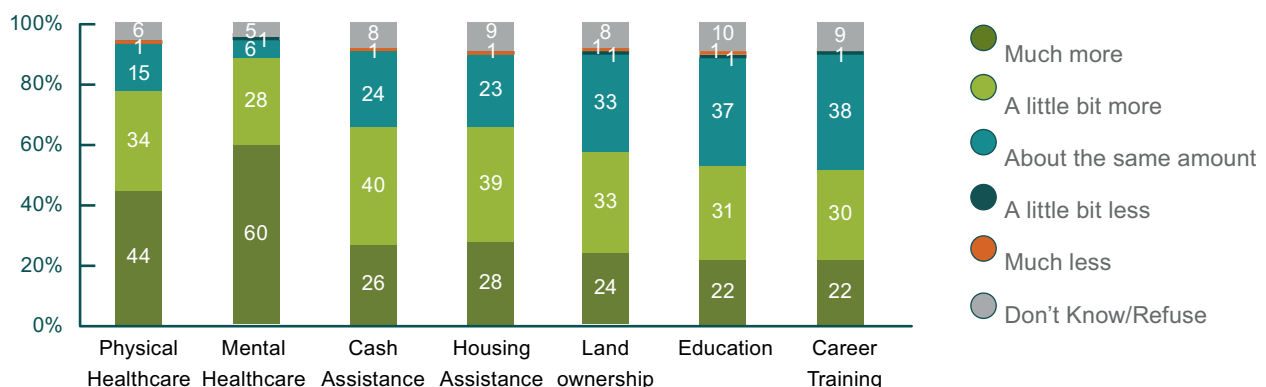


Figure 9: Public Perceptions on How Much Benefits/Public Assistance Veterans Should Receive vs. the Average Civilian, (%)



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healthcare, 78% of respondents think that veterans should get much more or a little bit more of these benefits compared to the average civilian.

Policy and Programming Implications

The VRS findings on veteran reintegration, social stigma, and support networks point to the need to explore the following areas for policy and programming purposes:

Create holistic integration programs for veterans and promote them through grassroots and informal networks

According to the VRS, 57% of veterans experienced some or a lot of difficulty reintegrating into civilian life, which means that more than half of veterans do not have appropriate tools or received sufficient services for a smooth transition into civilian society. Veterans often experience challenges due to psychological traumas, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), physical injuries, lack of employment, frustration, and loss of connection with family and community. Thus, reintegration programs need to not simply focus on one aspect of these challenges but instead use a holistic approach and provide support for many of the obstacles veterans face, such as employment and professional development, assistance with mental health for veterans and their families, and quality mental and physical healthcare.

For veterans to trust these efforts, reintegration programs should be coordinated with local networks of veterans, so that the programs could address the actual needs of veterans and establish good communication with veterans.

According to the VRS results, veterans have a strong and confident system of relationships with each other; however, 43% of veterans reported having fewer civilian friends than before they served, while they communicate with their fellow veterans every day (59% of active-duty veterans and 44% of non-active-duty veterans). Given their high trust in fellow veterans and veteran networks, reintegration efforts would be most successful if they are communicated through veteran leaders and veteran-focused grassroots organizations that are highly respected in the community. Preparing veteran leaders to be agents of change—by providing them with the necessary tools and knowledge through leadership and educational programs—would enable them to be positive role models and disseminate information about reintegration programs to their fellow veterans. Such leaders could promote reintegration activities and build trust within the veteran community. Using this approach and engaging more closely with grassroots communities, the Ministry of Veterans Affairs (MoVA) and other entities could gather the most up-to-date information on the emerging needs of veterans and design programs with realistic goals.

Support breaking down stereotypes about veterans.

Veterans have difficulty connecting with the local population in Ukraine—almost two-thirds of veterans felt that only a minority of civilians understand the challenges they face, and 22% felt that there were no civilians who could understand them. Additionally, many reported experiences of harassment and discrimination from strangers, with non-active-duty veterans experiencing this more than active-duty veterans. Based on international examples of successful reintegration, we recommend nationwide informational campaigns with targeted messaging

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that would showcase personal stories of veterans. Governmental institutions (under MoVA's leadership) could initiate community dialogue between leaders of veterans and nonveteran non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and governmental stakeholders to navigate a common road map on how to close the gap between the general population and veterans. Using a win-

win approach, both veterans and local populations would benefit from working together in the community. As highly disciplined and reliable individuals, veterans could contribute to the betterment of their communities, and being part of their communities, gaining respect, and securing jobs would positively impact veterans' own economic and mental well-being.