An exploratory needs assessment of Naval Station Long Beach's transition assistance management program for naval personnel

Ruth Ann Vaughan

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AN EXPLORATORY NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF NAVAL STATION LONG BEACH’S TRANSITION ASSISTANCE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM FOR NAVAL PERSONNEL

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Ruth Ann Vaughan
June 1993
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Presented to the Faculty of California State University, San Bernardino

by Ruth Ann Vaughan June 1993

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Abstract

This exploratory study helped to assess the transition assistance needs of separating naval personnel at Naval Station Long Beach. Due to the downsizing of the Navy and other Armed Forces, information gained from this survey will be useful to social workers and other professionals who work with service members entering the civilian work force. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from questionnaires that were in turn analyzed for significant correlations and needed changes in available services.
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Problem Statement

Due to military downsizing in the United States, there have been increasing numbers of military personnel either voluntarily or involuntarily separating from all branches of the armed forces. The defense budget will be decreased by more than 40 percent from 1985 to 1997 ("DoD Forwards", 1993). This includes a thirty percent reduction of military personnel. In order to help meet the employment and/or education needs of these active duty personnel as they enter the civilian job market, transition assistance programs have been created to help service members before and often after they leave the military. These programs have been established on military bases nationwide.

At the Family Service Center (FSC) at Naval Station Long Beach (NAVSTA LBCH) in Long Beach, California, the Transition Assistance Management Program (TAMP) was established in early 1992, as a result of Public Law 101-510, which mandated the transition assistance programs for separating active duty members (U.S. Statutes at Large, 1990). Currently, ships that are "home-ported" at NAVSTA LBCH are gradually being reassigned to other bases or are being "decommissioned". Decommissioning is a "shut-down" process of the entire ship, at the end of which the ship will be sent to a Naval storage facility where ships that are no longer being used are stored. NAVSTA LBCH will close at the end of September 1994.
Approximately 400 people per month are now using TAMP at NAVSTA LBCH and that number is expected to increase each month until 1994 (K. Denton, Personal interview, 1993). The available services in TAMP include workshops, resume assistance, individual career counseling, and a resource center equipped with word processors, job listings, and referral information. The urgency to assess this population’s needs in order to improve and expand their services has become critical due to the ever increasing number of clients, yet limited space and funds at the FSC.

The Navy has long assumed the responsibility of attempting to do whatever is possible to help alleviate emotional and financial stresses of their active duty members. Often, a factor of emotional stress is inadequate finances. The social workers at the FSC often see clients with individual and family problems that are associated with transition difficulties as they enter the civilian job market. The social work profession needs to be aware of the status and needs of this population and help support improved and expanded transition assistance programs in order to help prevent or resolve the stressors that often directly influence the psychological and social functioning of individuals and families.

Problem Focus

This study was a positivist, exploratory needs assessment, as little work has been done in this area. This
approach was the only one applicable to this study due to the lack of available information on these kinds of programs. The results were used to assist in future planning of this TAMP.

The major social work role that was addressed in this research project is that of administration and policy planning, while research/education played a smaller role. This study will help TAMP to better plan and execute their resources based on the anticipated needs of the target population. On a smaller scale, the study might help educate other TAMP’s across the country, as well as serve as a catalyst for future studies.

The need that was addressed is transition assistance for Naval personnel who are leaving the Navy and entering the civilian job market. The research question that was directly addressed is: What are the current and anticipated transition assistance needs of Naval personnel who are separating from the Navy at Naval Station Long Beach? This study is important to the social work profession because it identified needs and assisted in developing more appropriate services to this population.

Literature Review

Due to the newness of TAMP at NAVSTA LBCH and the way in which it was formed, little literature or statistics are available. Although the federal government mandated this program, no real guidelines or research are available by which
to shape and evaluate this service. Due to staff shortage, time, and funds, no assessments and/or evaluations have been done since the beginning of this program.

The available statistics come from the TAMP records at NAVSTA LBCH. 2,525 Navy personnel attended a workshop in 1992, with an average of 90 people for each of the 28 workshops. It is estimated that there will be 48 workshops in 1993 for a total of 4,320 attendees (K. Denton, Personal interview, 1993). Active duty Navy personnel decreased from 583,000 in Fiscal Year (FY) 91 to 542,000 at the beginning of FY93. By FY95, the number will be down to 509,000 ("DoD Forwards", 1993).

The 1987 Annual Survey of Army Families reports some demographic statistics that are relevant to Navy families, and in turn, to this study. For instance, the majority of enlisted Army married couples are under the age of 30 and have only a high school education (Griffith, Stewart, & Cato, 1988). This finding indicates that the need for career transition assistance may be in a large demand due to young age and less education among service members. Exploring these demographic items among Navy families will help to pinpoint needed changes in TAMP services.

Purpose of the Study

The goal of this research was to explore what the transition assistance needs are of Naval personnel who are
separating from the U.S. Navy. This information was used in helping the director of TAMP at NAVSTA LBCH to evaluate existing services and help plan needed changes to better assist separating personnel.

**Research Question**

Since this study was an exploratory needs assessment and causality is not being determined, both qualitative and quantitative data were used. Subjective measures were appropriate for this study in order to get a better feel for what needs to be improved for future studies and evaluations. The research question for this study was: What are the current and anticipated transition assistance needs of Naval personnel who are separating from the Navy at Naval Station Long Beach?

**Sampling**

Forty-six Naval personnel who are separating from the Navy at Naval Station Long Beach were selected for study. These personnel include all ranks and classifications. They were chosen on a non-probability, availability basis as they entered the FSC for transition assistance between the two month period from January to March 1993. The questionnaires were given to the participants by the researcher or TAMP employees once they had signed their names in the daily attendance book in the resource room. The reason for this method of sampling was due to the difficulty of obtaining
true probability sample within the time restraints of this study.

Data Collection and Instruments

Data was collected by distributing a questionnaire to active duty Naval personnel who entered the FSC after data collection began and who were seeking assistance for civilian employment as they prepare to leave the Navy. (See Appendix B.) The results of these questions were compiled and entered into a statistics software program in order for the concepts and variables to be measured.

As no instrument exists to measure this particular program, this instrument was created to specifically fit the needs of this agency. The strengths of this instrument were conciseness, brevity, and simplicity. The limitations of this instrument were lack of reliability and generalization.

The demographic items included on the questionnaire helped to establish a clearer picture of exactly who TAMP is serving. In turn, the questions regarding future plans and needed services will help TAMP to better meet the needs of the target population(s). The questions regarding voluntary versus involuntary separation and levels of anxiety were of particular interest to the FSC as they try to meet the emotional needs, as well as the occupational needs of Naval personnel. The question regarding how respondents hear about TAMP was also of particular interest to the FSC as they try to
improve the publicity of their services. This study used a survey design in which data was gathered from the answered questionnaire items. Data collection took two months to complete.

Protection of Human Subjects

Confidentiality and anonymity of participants was assured through a statement and consent form accompanying the survey. This form was signed by both participant and researcher. (See attached consent form.) Confidentiality was gained by limiting access to the completed questionnaires to the researcher and TAMP employees. Anonymity occurred by the signed consent forms being separated from the questionnaires before the data was tabulated.

Data Analysis

In order to measure and analyze the quantitative data in this study, measures of central tendency were used. These measures include means, modes, and medians. After each individual item had been analyzed, cross-tabulations were run in order to show relationships between factors. Significance tests were then run to measure the relationships.

"Transition assistance" was the concept in this study. Any aid that TAMP employees can give personnel seeking civilian employment (e.g., resume assistance, employment workshops, or individual counseling) was a construct of this concept. The variables were the questionnaire items them-
selves. Correlational relationships among variables were expected to be seen in the analysis.

Results

Who are the users of TAMP? -- (n=46) According to the data, the average respondent was a 29.5 year-old, enlisted, white male who had been in the service for 9 years. He was married and had no children. Separating voluntarily with a high school education, he experienced high anxiety. With plans to relocate, he was referred to TAMP and will seek a job outside of the LA/Long Beach area.

The mean age of respondents was 29.5, with a range from 22 to 48. 93% were males. 67% were white, 24% black, while 9% were other minorities. 85% were enlisted, while 15% were officers. The mean number of years of service was nine, with a range from three to 29 years. 51% did have previous employment, while 49% did not. 61% were married, 33% were single, and 6% were separated. 65% had no children, while the remaining 35% had one or two children. 39% had only a high school education, 37% had some college, and the remaining 24% had a college degree. Only two respondents (4%) were involuntarily separating from the Navy, while 96% were voluntarily separating. The mean level of anxiety was seven on a scale of one to 10, with 10 being the highest level of anxiety. 65% found out about TAP through a referral, 20% through previously using TAP, and 9% through advertisements. 30% have plans to
get a job in the LA/Long Beach area, 28% want a job elsewhere and to pursue a higher education, 26% want a job elsewhere, 7% plan to pursue a higher education, and 4% want a job in the area and to pursue higher education. 85% plan to relocate outside of L.A. and Orange counties.

What are their needs? — In response to the question about what specific services respondents needed in TAMP, the overwhelming response was the need for some form of individual assistance. The second highest category was obtaining access to job referrals, while the third category of responses was the need for using office equipment (computers, facsimile machines, copiers, etc.).

29 people reported the need for some form of individual assistance regarding resumes, SF-171 (government job) applications, VA benefits, and/or general career change advice. 19 people reported needing access to job listings (including DORS, which is the nation-wide database system for job listings), current job market information, and information on job fairs. Four people said that they needed office equipment such as computers, printers, copiers, facsimile machines, and/or telephones. (Some gave no response or more than one response to this question.)

In response to the question about what else respondents think the Navy can do for those separating, there were a total of 24 responses. Six respondents expressed a desire to see
more flexibility and concern from their individual commands for separating personnel to use TAMP. A total of eight other responses also reflected some sort of criticism or exasperation with the Navy during the separation process, (e.g., "Give us a break!"). The remaining 10 responses were advocating for already existing services or were unrealistic responses which were not included in the analysis. (Again, some gave no response or more than one response to this question.)

Anxiety Trends -- TAMP employees, social workers, and other professionals who work with separating personnel need to be aware of what factors contribute to high anxiety levels, in order to improve the delivery of their services. The variables which appear to be related to a high level of anxiety in separating from the military are gender, years of service, marital status, level of education, and plans after separation.

An F-ratio significance test or Pearson's R-correlation test was run to test for relationships between certain variables and the anxiety levels of respondents. Males had an average anxiety level of 7.26; females had an average anxiety level of 4.33. Cross-tabulating gender with anxiety revealed that males were more anxious than females, which was significant at the 0.05 level. When anxiety was tested against years of service, a 0.86 positive linear correlation was found. As for marital status, singles had an average anxiety level of
7.20, married people 6.80, and separated people 9.33. A Chi-square revealed that singles were more anxious, with significance at the 0.01 level. Those with just a high school education had an average anxiety level of 7.61; those with some college were 7.29; and those with a college degree were 5.50. It appeared that more education decreased anxiety, and was significant at the 0.01 level. As for plans after separation, those who were seeking a job in the LA/Long Beach area had the highest average anxiety of 7.46; those seeking a job elsewhere were 7.08; while those seeking higher education and/or a job had an average anxiety of 7.11. Significance was found at the 0.01 level.

Discussion

Since most respondents indicated a need for individual assistance on different aspects of their job search, it seems particularly important that TAMP maintains their current number of five full-time employees to help meet those needs. Furthermore, because the demographic data indicates that the majority of respondents tend to be young, less educated, and have a high amount of anxiety about the transition process into the civilian job market, TAMP should be prepared to meet more needs than they might have originally prepared to meet when this program began. Increasing job referral sources seems to be the next highest priority, as respondents also see these job referrals as important. Although few mentioned the
use of office equipment as important, this too should be kept as a high priority. Many respondents may not have access to these facilities.

The only significant response regarding what else could be done by the Navy for separating personnel seems to be that of increased flexibility and concern from each command. Although there are career counselors at each command to assist personnel as they separate, it seems apparent to some that not enough is being done to help in this process.

Limitations of the Study

Because of the low number of respondents (n=46), it is difficult to generalize. Additionally, the statistic of the total number of separating personnel during the two-month period of this assessment was not available to use as a comparison. This figure could only be obtained by calling all of the separate commands at NAVSTA LBCH—a nearly impossible task, as the ships are often at sea and, while in port, their telephone lines are constantly busy. Furthermore, the definition of "separating active duty members" would lead to ambiguous and faulty numbers, as some of the commands would define "separating" as a few weeks and others several months before the actual date of separation.

Another limitation is that of inaccurate responses due to the respondents not understanding certain questions or inaccurate self-reporting. Also, having more than one person
give explanations to respondent’s questions to better understand a questionnaire item contributes to a lack of uniformity as to what each question does in fact mean.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

As the limitations of this study are taken into consideration, the TAMP director, as well as the director of the FSC, need to advocate to their superiors who, in turn, can activate changes among the many commands at NAVSTA LBCH to show more support and flexibility with their separating personnel. Many in the Navy feel as though enough is being done to assist those leaving, yet this exploratory assessment indicates that this perception may not be a valid one among junior personnel. This concern needs to be further explored through more research. Social work professionals should be aware of the findings of this study as they deal with separating personnel and their families either in financial and/or personal counseling.
APPENDIX A

Consent Form

The attached questionnaire is part of a research project for Ruth Ann Vaughan, social work intern at the Family Service Center. She is a graduate student at California State University at San Bernardino in San Bernardino, CA, where she is working on her masters degree in social work.

The purpose of this survey is to study this Transition Assistance Management Program (TAMP) and gain a clearer picture of TAMP's clients' needs in order to improve existing services and possibly create new ones.

Your participation in completing this questionnaire is vital in obtaining the input needed to improve TAMP. The information requested on the questionnaire is for statistical purposes only and will be kept confidential. Your signature that is required on this consent form will not be used to identify you in the research.

If you have any questions regarding this questionnaire, you may contact Mrs. Vaughan at the Family Service Center on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays between 0730 and 1400 at 547-8220. You may also contact her faculty supervisor, Dr. Nancy Mary, at (909) 880-5560.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

/s/ J.A. Kendall
Lieutenant, US Navy
Director, Family Service Center

I consent to serve as a participant in the research project regarding the Transition Assistance Management Program at the Family Service Center at Naval Station Long Beach. The nature and general purpose have been explained in the above statement.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that all information is confidential and that my identity will not be revealed. I am free to withdraw consent and to discontinue participation at any time. My willingness or refusal to participate in this study will in no way affect what services I may or may not receive at the Family Service Center. Any questions about this project will be answered by the researcher or the faculty advisor.

On the basis of the above statements, I agree to participate in this project.

Participant's Signature/Date

Researcher's Signature/Date

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APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE

1) Age: _____
2) Gender: (1) male (2) female
3) Ethnicity: (1) Black (2) White (3) Hispanic (4) Asian/Pacific (5) Native Amer. (6) Other _____
4) Rank: _____
5) Number of years in U.S. Navy: _____
6) Did you have a previous full-time civilian job before entering the Navy? (1) yes (2) no If so, what occupation? _____________________
7) Marital status: (1) single, never married (2) engaged (3) married (4) separated (5) divorced (6) widowed
8) Number of children: _____
9) Highest completed level of education: (1) high school (2) some college (but no degree) (3) associate degree (4) bachelor’s degree (5) master’s degree (6) doctorate degree
10) Are you voluntarily or involuntarily leaving the Navy? (1) involuntarily (2) voluntarily
11) On a scale of 1 to 10, how much anxiety do you feel over leaving the Navy? (Circle number.)
   NOT ANXIOUS   VERY ANXIOUS
   1 <_---------------------------------------------------------------_> 10
   2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
12) How did you hear about this Transition Assistance Management Program? (1) Have previously used TAMP (3) Advertisement (2) Referral (4) Other _____
13) What are your tentative plans after getting out of the Navy? (1) Obtaining civilian job in the L.A./Long Beach Area (2) Obtaining civilian job elsewhere (3) Pursuing higher level of education (4) Other (please specify): ________________________________ (5) Have no plans
14) Will you relocate to another part of the country (anywhere outside of L.A. or Orange counties)? (1) yes (2) no If yes, where? ______
15) What specific services do you need that TAMP can provide? ______
16) Apart from TAMP, what else do you think the Navy can do for active duty personnel who are leaving the Navy? ______
(Use other side of page if necessary.)
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Denton, Karen. TAMP director at Family Service Center, Long Beach Naval Station, Long Beach, CA. Personal interview. 29 April 1993.

