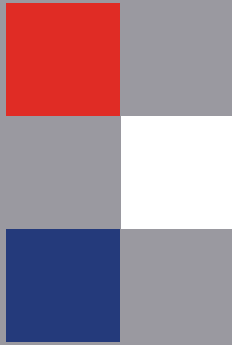




# VETERAN JOB RETENTION SURVEY **SUMMARY**



## ABOUT

This report is published by the Institute for Veterans and Military Families and VetAdvisor. Principal authors of the report are Rosalinda Maury, M.S., Brice Stone, Ph.D., and Jennifer Roseman, M.A. We would like to acknowledge all of the veterans who provided data and support for this document.

### THE INSTITUTE FOR VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES (IVMF)

The IVMF is the first interdisciplinary national institute in higher education focused on the social, economic, education and policy issues impacting veterans and their families post-service. Through our focus on veteran-facing programming, research and policy, employment and employer support, and community engagement, the institute provides in-depth analysis of the challenges facing the veteran community, captures best practices and serves as a forum to facilitate new partnerships and strong relationships between the individuals and organizations committed to making a difference for veterans and military families.

### VETADVISOR

VetAdvisor® is the nation's expert in veteran-centric integrative care. We provide proactive coaching services across behavioral health, wellness, financial, and all aspects of transition and career development. Additionally, our training staff works with organizations to help them more effectively recruit, retain, and interface with veterans.

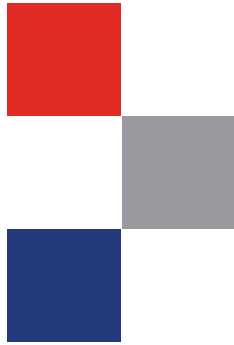
We believe that today's veterans are the next greatest generation, but they need our support. They need services that are integrated, veteran-centric, proactive and preventative.

Personal, family, and financial strains can result from deployment or lengthy assignment in dangerous locations. Both private and public sector employers, as well as colleges and universities and non-profits, need to ensure that returning service members have access to support services such as VetAdvisor® to address behavioral health, family, and personal issues and provide mentoring as veterans transition back into the workplace.

Inspired by his years as a Navy officer, VetAdvisor® CEO Dan Frank wanted to start a different kind of company, one that would harness the power of a dynamic business to solve social issues. Guided by this vision of using technology to foster change, Frank built VetAdvisor® around the principle of social goodness: the idea that the bottom line is not just profit but also the social value business can provide.

Founded by a veteran with the goal of serving those who have served our country, VetAdvisor® comprehensively supports veterans with complex conditions by fostering a culture of emotional wellness as part of our integrative health strategy.

Our contact centers are staffed with coaches specializing in occupational, wellness, financial, and behavioral health for veterans, active duty, guardsmen, and reservists. Coaching is about achieving the empowerment necessary for veterans to lead a complete life.



# WHY VETERANS LEAVE THEIR INITIAL POST-MILITARY JOB

## BACKGROUND

VetAdvisor and the Institute for Veterans and Military Families at Syracuse University (IVMF) have partnered in a research effort aimed to better understand post-military veteran employment. There are currently over 21 million veterans and since 2001 there have been over 2.8 million that have transitioned. At times, in an economy where unemployment is high, finding an appropriate job upon separation from service has proven especially challenging. Although expanded resources are available to veterans, they still face significant challenges as they re-enter civilian life.

The purpose of this research project is to explore the reasons why veterans leave their initial post-military jobs. Because there is limited research and data in this specific area, a survey was implemented to understand how organizations can best structure their veteran-centric employee retention programs and improve veteran' retention in the workplace.

## SUMMARY

Three primary findings emerged from the survey. First, nearly half of those surveyed stayed in their first post-separation position 12 months or less. Further, there is an association between job tenure and job alignment with the respondent's preferred career field. Second, the three employment-related issues of greatest importance to respondents were: opportunities to apply their skills and abilities; adequate benefits and pay; and meaningfulness of the work. Third, respondents' biggest obstacle to obtaining initial employment was finding opportunities that match their military training and experience.



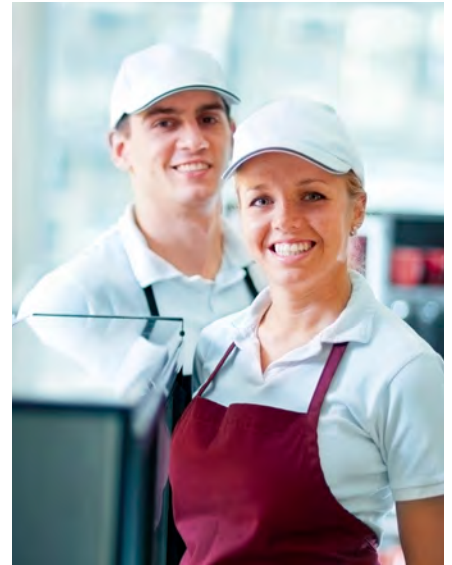




## FINDINGS

The findings presented in this paper support three major conclusions:

- Veterans identified the biggest obstacle to attaining employment was finding opportunities that match past military training and experience. This provides a strong justification for private- and government-sponsored programs that expedite, streamline, and tailor job searches for veterans of all levels and types of experience and knowledge.
- Nine out of ten respondents identified the opportunity to use their skills and abilities as the most important aspect of civilian employment. This finding supports the need for better employer education on translation of military skills and more efficient and effective job search tools for veterans especially in using the skills and abilities acquired during military service. Several aspects of career development, benefits, work environment, and employee relationship with management were also identified as important retention considerations. Employers wishing to increase veteran employee retention should therefore offer specific programs (i.e., opportunities for employees to take part in more advanced or diverse activities, effective compensation programs which may include health care and family friendly benefits, effective communications with senior management, and opportunities for contributions to the organization) to aid in employee retention in the civilian workforce..
- Regardless of the number of jobs held, there was an association between job alignment and job tenure with the respondent's preferred career field. This reinforces the importance of matching job requirements and aspirations with veteran qualifications, both by improving the efficiency of job search for veterans of all skill types and levels and identifying and matching veterans with new opportunities relevant to their desired career field. In all, over 14 percent of the respondents indicated that they were presently working in their first civilian job. Of those who left their first job, nearly half of the respondents left in their first year and over 65 percent left within two years. On average, respondents employed in their preferred career field reported longer average job tenure. Former military officers reported longer average job tenure than enlisted personnel, particularly for their first post-military job.

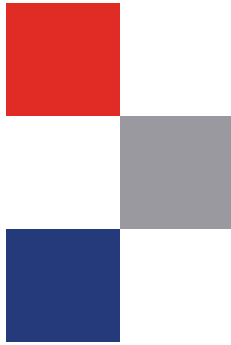


## METHODS

The Veterans Job Retention Survey was administered online December 16, 2013 to February 11, 2014 using Qualtrics software. Although this study relies on a convenience sample, researchers took lengthy measures to mitigate sampling bias. Specifically, survey recruitment outreach was broad and was leveraged through social media and distribution via veteran non-profits, supportive service organizations, and professional organizations.

The retention survey was approved by the Syracuse University Institutional Review Board for research involving human subjects and consisted of 167 questions that elicited participants' employment experiences and demographics. Respondents were able to skip questions that were not relevant to them. The survey was taken by 1,484 respondents. Of these initial participants, 1,248 sufficiently completed the questionnaire. The average time to complete the survey was 26 minutes.

More than 43 percent of the respondents served 20 or more years on active duty service, while 23.84 percent served 4 years or less. More than 84 percent of the veteran respondents are male and the average age for the veteran respondents is 48.57 years with a median age of 49 years. Nearly 29 percent of the respondents indicate that they have a bachelor's degree while more than 50 percent of the respondents have a bachelor's degree or more. More than 65 percent of the respondents were currently working, more than 24 percent were not working but looking for work, and 9.6 percent were not working and not looking for work. Of those looking for work, over 46 percent were searching for work for 26 weeks or more.

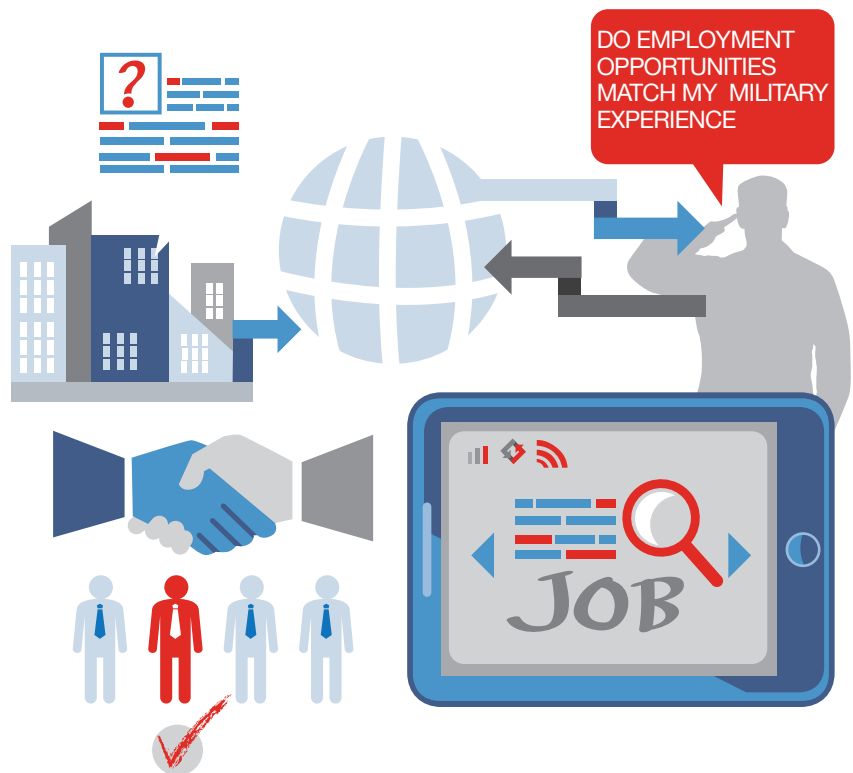
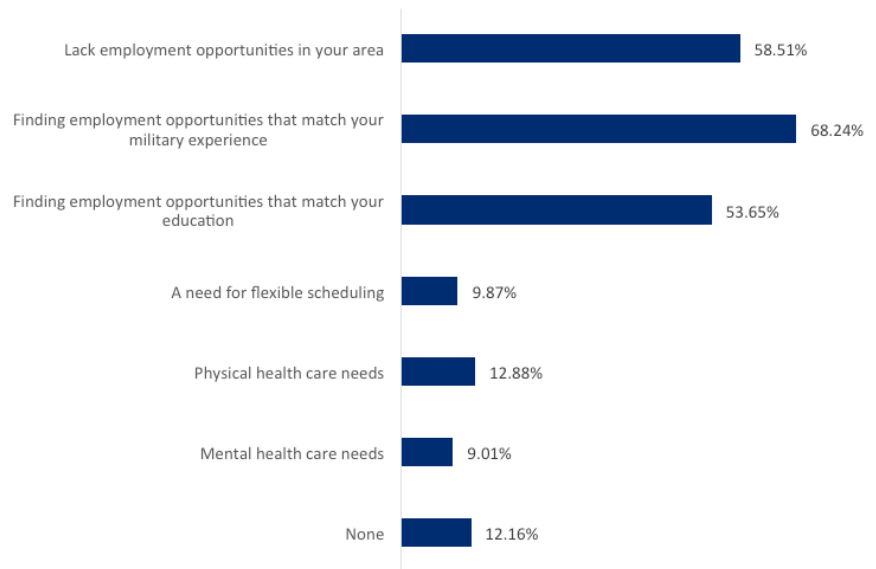


## RESULTS

### *Biggest Obstacles*

Respondents were asked about their biggest obstacle to obtaining employment. The obstacle most often cited was finding employment opportunities that match military experience, followed by lack of local employment opportunities and then finding employment opportunities that matched education. Only 10 percent of the respondents indicated there were no obstacles confronted in attaining employment, which is represented by the “none” response in Figure 1.

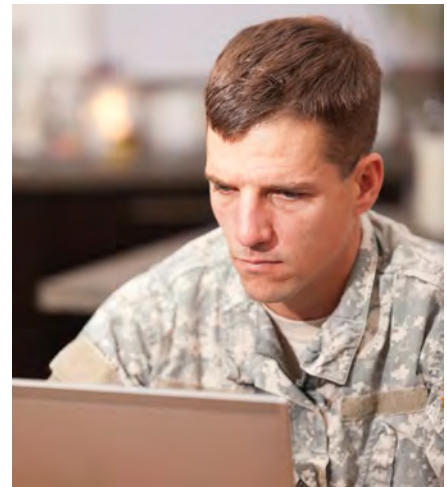
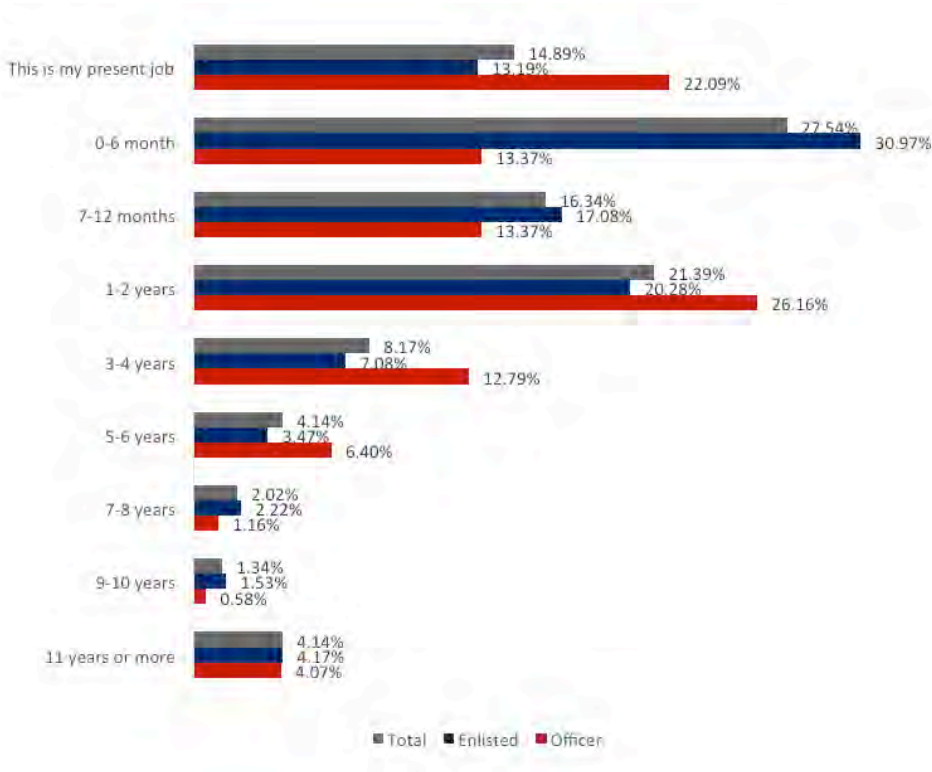
**Figure 1. Biggest Obstacle in Obtaining Employment**



**First Post Military Job**

Figure 2 presents the response percentages to the question concerning how long the respondent stayed in their first job. Only 14.89 percent of the respondents indicated that they were presently working in their first job. More than 27 percent of the respondents were in their first job six or less months and 16.3 percent were in their first job between 7 to 12 months. This results in more than 43 percent in their first job for 12 months or less. Respondents who indicated that they were officers during their military service exhibited a higher percentage of those presently working in their first job, 22.09 percent, versus 13.19 percent for responders who indicated that they were enlisted personnel during their military service. Officer respondents were 1.675 times more likely than enlisted respondents to indicate that their first job post military service was their present job.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 2. Length of First Job By Rank**



<sup>1</sup> Respondents exhibited statistically significantly different response rates when comparing officer respondents to enlisted respondents



Respondents indicating that they have held more than one job since leaving the military were asked to provide their reason(s) for leaving their first post-military job. New employment opportunity was the reason cited most often (Figure 3), followed by lack of career development and advancement, quality of work (e.g., not meaningful, unchallenging, tedious, etc.), and inadequate compensation or benefits.

Figure 3. Reason(s) For Leaving First Post-Military Job



### LEFT BECAUSE:



Lack of career development and advancement



Quality of work (e.g., not meaningful, unchallenging, tedious, etc.)

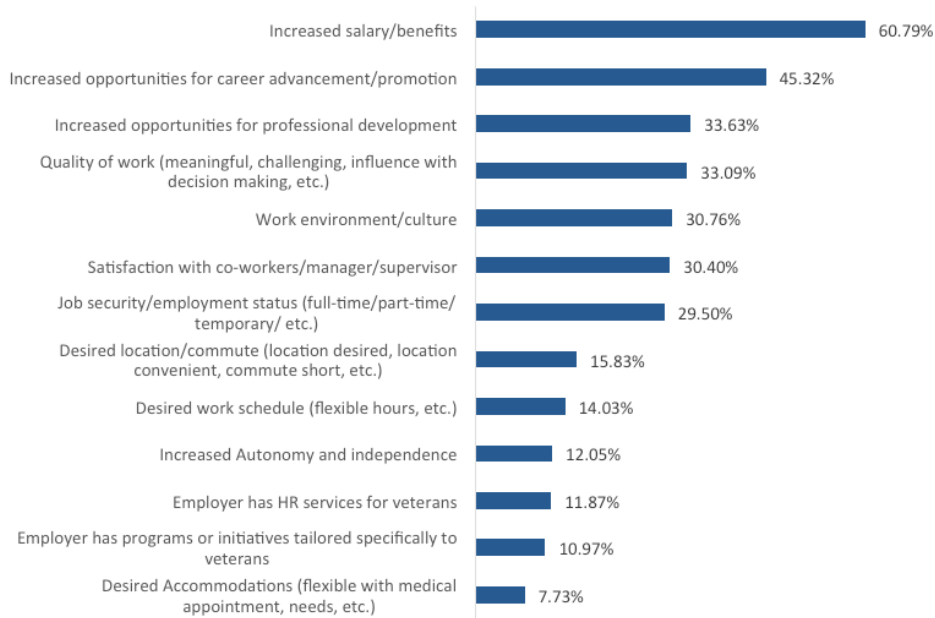


New employment opportunity



Respondents having held multiple civilian jobs were also asked what would have made them keep their first job out of the military. Increased benefits was cited the most, followed by increased opportunities for career advancement and promotion, and increased opportunities for professional development (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Reason(S) Which Would Have Stayed at First Post-Military Job



**WOULD HAVE STAYED:**



Increased opportunities for career advancement/promotion

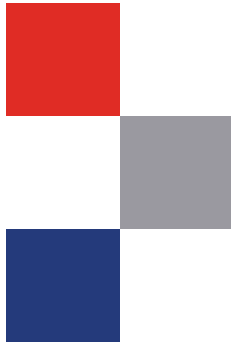


Increased opportunities for professional development



Increases compensation/benefits



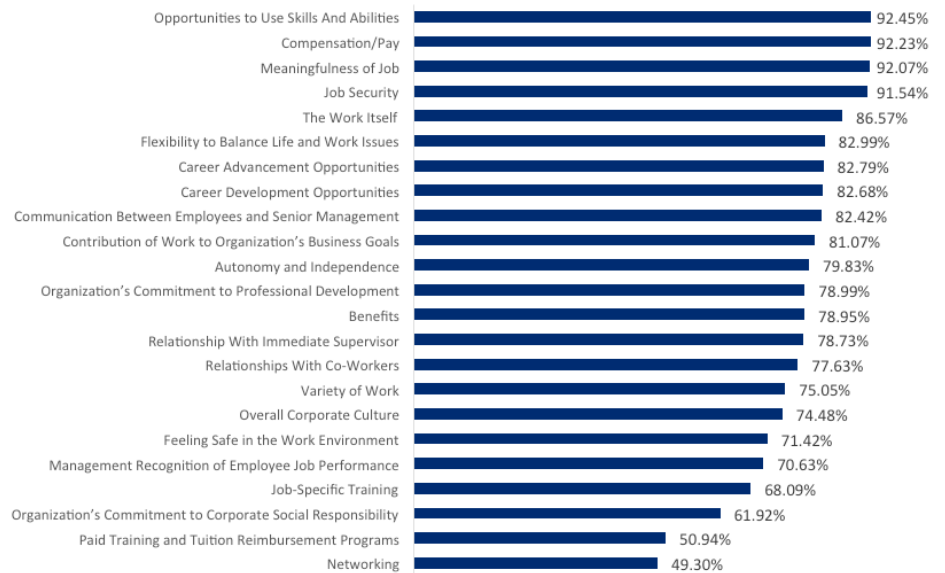


### Important Aspects of Employment

Respondents were asked to rate the level of importance of 24 different employment aspects on a one (Unimportant) to five (Very Important) point scale. Opportunities to use skills and abilities was rated the highest, followed by benefits and pay, meaningfulness of job, and job security (Figure 5). These top four aspects account for 92 percent of responses. The lowest rated of the 24 aspects was organization’s commitment to a green workplace. The top three rated aspects of employment are consistent with the reason(s) provided for leaving their first post-military job as well as the reason(s) provided for considering staying at their first position/ job.



Figure 5. Percent of Respondents Selecting “Important” or “Very Important” for the Specific Aspect of Employment

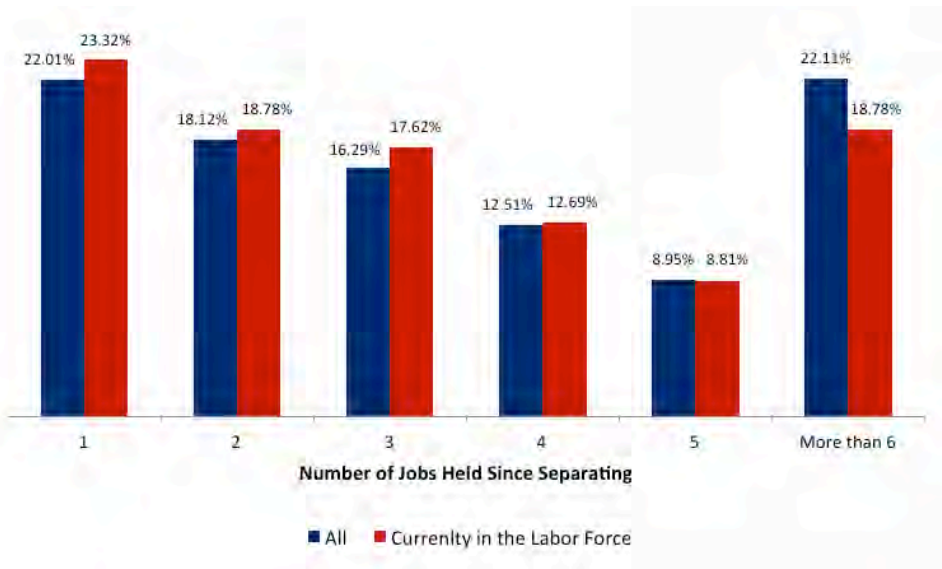


### Job Tenure

The average number of months in the first job was 25.59. The average job tenure (months) increases from the first job through the 5th job, but declines for the sixth job. For each job held, respondents were also asked if they were in their preferred career field. Approximately 40.34 percent of respondent indicated they were in their preferred career field in their first job. When looking at the percentage of respondents in the preferred career field from the first job up to the sixth, the average percentage increases from the first job through the 4th job but declines afterwards. The two series are highly positively correlated ( $r^2 = 0.8160$ ). This is unsurprising since one would expect individuals to exhibit higher retention and tenure in jobs that align closely with their preferred career field.

Figure 6 presents the distribution numbers of jobs held since leaving the military. Of the 984 responses, only 5.79 percent indicated they had not had a job since leaving the service. Of the 927 responses indicating one or more jobs held since leaving the service, the two largest responses cited were more than six jobs, at 22.11 percent, and one job, at 22.01 percent. When excluding responders that are no longer in the labor force, the response most frequently cited is one job with 23.32 percent of the sample.

Figure 6. Number of Jobs Held Since Separating from the Military

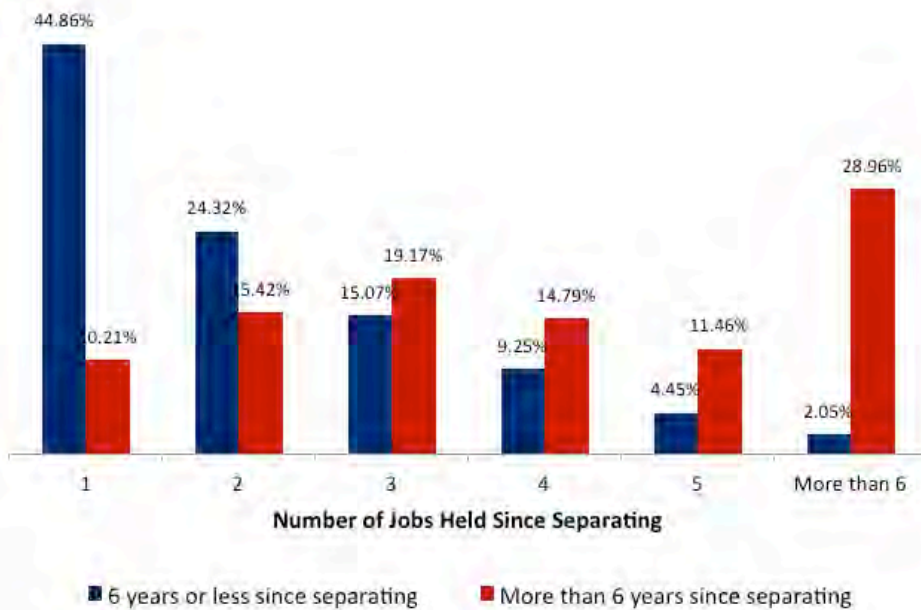






To obtain a better understanding about job mobility of the veteran responses, Figure 7 presents the number of jobs held by participants in the labor force since their departure from military service. Obviously, job mobility is more likely for those who have been separated from the military longer. The majority of responders who have been separated from service for 6 or less years have had 2 or more jobs, while the majority of those who have been separated from service for more than 6 years have had 4 or more jobs. Furthermore, the survey shows that more than 40 percent of participants who have been separated from service for more than six years have had five or more jobs. On average, participants in the labor force change jobs about every 4 years.

**Figure 7. Number of Jobs Held Since Separating from the Military by Number of Years Since Separation**



### *Mobility and Job Searches*

More than 60 percent of the respondents indicated a different state of residence upon leaving the military compared to their home of record, while 59.02 percent indicated a different current state of residence from their home of record. In addition, 37.94 of the respondents indicated that their state of residence had changed since leaving the military. The highest cited method used by respondents for searching for their current job was networking through military connections. Across the six possible jobs held by respondents, the most cited method used by respondents for searching for their current job, on average, was online job boards and career tools (Military.com, LinkedIn, Monster.com, etc.), followed by networking through family and friends, and networking through military connections.





## CONCLUSION

Respondents to the survey identified three key issues of importance in their employment: opportunities to use skills and abilities, compensation and pay, and meaningfulness of job. These issues were consistently ranked as the most important to respondents across past jobs and current jobs. In addition, job tenure was highly related to working in a job or position in the respondents' preferred career field. Job search and job match are key components of any proposed solutions for veterans in the civilian labor market during transition and thereafter. The biggest obstacle identified in attaining employment by veterans was finding employment opportunities that match their military training or experience. Of those who left their first job, nearly half of the respondents left in their first year and over 65 percent left within two years. Organizations that wish to recruit and retain veteran employees should develop veteran-centric recruitment strategies and employee benefit programs. Specifically, organizations wishing to increase veteran employee retention should: provide education on translation of military skills to corporate recruiters and HR professionals; develop veteran-centric employee benefit programs to assist veteran employees in developing a post-military career path; and develop streamlined and expedited job search programs for veterans to provide a better match between employers and job seekers.





