

Study shows two career assessment screenings effective for veterans, civilians

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When veterans leave the military, they not only have the possibility of significant challenges like lasting physical injuries, post-traumatic stress disorder or mental health concerns, they also face the reality of

transitioning to a new life, often in higher education or a new career field. While many services are in place to help address the physical and mental obstacles, little research has been performed on measures designed to help in the educational and career paths. A new study from the University of Kansas has found two measures designed to help civilian students are also effective for veterans.

Career counselors, college advisers and practitioners routinely use measures called the Occupational Engagement Scale-Student (OES-S) and the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale-U.S. (CAAS) in measuring how engaged people are in their educational journey and how adaptable they are in learning new skills or devoting themselves to vocations.

"We looked at these measures strictly from a career-development standpoint. There has been a movement in recent years to determine how engaged people are in vocational settings and how adaptable they are in career planning," said Arpita Ghosh, assistant professor of educational psychology at KU and the study's lead author. "There's been a good amount of research in these areas of engagement and adaptability in civilian college students, but nobody has really been doing that work with veterans."

To determine if the two common tools to measure those qualities are valid for both civilians and researchers, study authors conducted the interventions with a sample of 418 U.S. [military veterans](#) and 411 civilians. The findings showed both tools measured the same constructs for both populations with little variance, meaning they are likely effective for both research and practice with veterans transitioning from the military.

The article, written with co-authors Christopher Niileksela, assistant professor of educational psychology, and Elizabeth Grzesik, doctoral candidate, all at KU, was published in the *Journal of Career Assessment*.

Veterans have unique experiences due to their service and often struggle to reintegrate into society, while experiences such as combat and trauma can be associated with negative work and life outcomes. Research has also shown veterans can struggle to find and maintain civilian work due to physical or psychological injuries or challenges translating their military skills to civilian work.

"I think the findings of this study are important because we now have evidence that both of these scales work for both populations," Ghosh said. "Now we know researchers and practitioners have effective tools they can use to help veterans make the transition and set and pursue [career goals](#)."

The two scales measure occupational engagement, or how an individual gathers information to make decisions and increase knowledge of one's self, the world of work and relationship between the two, the authors wrote. They also gauge career adaptability in four resources: concern, or looking ahead and preparing for the future; taking control of vocational future; curiosity about exploring different selves and future outcomes; and confidence, such as being more confident to pursue goals and aspirations. The OES-S, developed at KU, adult version is designed for employed adults looking to change jobs. The CAAS measures psychosocial resources needed to manage work transitions and work-related trauma in subscales of concern, control, curiosity and confidence.

The sample of the veterans and civilians each who took both interventions showed they measured subscales consistently across both populations and varying demographics such as age, gender and race. The only variation found was in the concern subscale, in which civilians reported slightly higher levels of concern about looking forward in a career and preparing for the future. Ghosh said that is likely the result of veterans experiencing goal setting and training in moving through career advancement as a matter of course in the military experience.

"The Department of Defense does a good job of helping people build career goals so they can make advancements. Also, once veterans leave the military, many veterans also seek services that can help them build skills and confidence that most civilians do not have access to," Ghosh said.

Ghosh, who has also published research on effectiveness of mental health screenings for veterans transitioning to [higher education](#), said the current study is helpful in building a larger body of knowledge about how various subsets of society such as higher education faculty, career counselors, mental health practitioners, employers and communities can all help veterans successfully transition from the military to civilian life.

"I think it's neat to see that, even though these specific tools weren't originally designed for [veterans](#), they can help them," Ghosh said.

"There has been a lot of research looking at how measures work for things like post-[traumatic stress disorder](#) or depression, but I think this is one of the first studies to look at [career](#) goals and transitions as well."

More information: Arpita Ghosh et al, Measurement Invariance of the Occupational Engagement Scale—Student and Career Adapt-Abilities Scale across Veterans and Civilians, *Journal of Career Assessment* (2022). [DOI: 10.1177/10690727211059735](https://doi.org/10.1177/10690727211059735)

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