

2015

Women Veterans & Employment
Opportunities for Future Research



VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SERVICE
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

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Women Veterans and Employment – Opportunities for Future Research

Women veterans are the minority of both the veteran population and the working women population and have historically been under-studied. To identify the best ways to serve the employment needs of women veterans, the Department of Labor (DOL) Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) Women Veteran Program conducted broad analysis of the employment situation for women veterans. For more information on the findings of the review, please visit <http://go.usa.gov/3kfve>.

During the analysis, common research challenges and several opportunities for future research were identified.

Common Research Challenges

Missing Variables

One challenge in understanding issues related to employment for women veterans is that much of the publicly available data related to veterans do not differentiate by gender. In some research studies this reflects insufficient samples to conduct a more differentiated analysis. In others, the question of potential differences in study outcomes by gender was not part of the original study design and it is not clear from published research findings whether sufficient data would be available for a gender analysis.

A similar challenge is that publicly available data related to working women do not differentiate by veteran status. These missing variables in existing data make it difficult to identify veteran trends, gender trends, overlaps of the two, and unexplained phenomena. Including both a gender variable and a veteran variable in all future employment-related research may reveal valuable trends pertaining to women veterans' employment.

Faulty Generalizations

Research specific to women veterans has been primarily concentrated in the medical and mental health fields. Samples are often obtained through programs or services designed for veterans who are currently experiencing hardship (such as trauma clinics). Often, the findings of non-probability sampling are improperly quoted to generalize the entire population of women veterans, rather than the actual sample universe. These generalizations may contribute to damaging myths and stigmas while leaving much unknown about the larger population of women veterans. When using the findings of research pertaining to women veterans, it is very important to note the actual sample universe to avoid faulty generalizations. For example, if a sample of 100 women veterans are selected from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health registries, the sample universe is *women enrolled in the VA health care system*, which is not necessarily representative of all women veterans.

Recommendations for Future Research

Women Veterans' Self-Concept/Group Identity and Employment Services

One challenge in conducting outreach to women veterans is that many women do not self-identify as veterans, making them difficult to find. Reasons reported by women veterans include confusion in definitions, generational norms, and personal experiences. In the general population (without a veteran variable), group identity has been associated with shared characteristics between members of a given group. Self-concept has been found to impact both attitude and behavior (Di Leone, B. A. L., et. al., 2015). It is unknown how group identity and self-concept related to veteran status may or may not impact job-seeking skills and/or receptivity to use employment services among women veterans. Correlational research pertaining to group identity/self-concept and willingness to use/need for employment services may provide insights to inform outreach efforts and/or customer service training for employment service providers.

Women Veterans' Employment and Stereotype Threat

The social-psychological phenomenon known as “stereotype threat” has been cited by social science researchers as contributing to decreased performance among girls. Stereotype threat refers to members of a group being more likely to perform according to a negative stereotype after they are made aware of the stereotype (Danaher, K. & Crandall, C., 2008). Correlational research exploring exposure to negative or positive women veteran stereotypes and employment status may provide insights as to how self-esteem and ability to market oneself to employers may be influenced by societal messaging. Such insights may inform future communication campaigns and/or transition training.

Potential Gender-Based Confidence Gap after Military Service

The underlying lack of confidence in working women compared to working men has been coined “the confidence gap” and used to describe a barrier that women in professional careers often unknowingly place upon themselves (Kay, K. & Shipman, C. 2014). One study cites the confidence gap as a primary driver of pay discrepancy, with women being less likely to negotiate salary than men (Babcock, L., et. al., 2003). In *Battlefields to Boardrooms* (Bensahel, et. al., 2015), researchers state “interestingly, our interviews with military women suggest that they may struggle less with confidence issues than their civilian peers.” While this is promising, the key words “military women,” not “women veterans” or “women with military experience” suggest the interviews were conducted with women still on active duty. As veterans of both genders often experience challenges adjusting to civilian culture and are often unprepared for salary negotiation, it is hard to hypothesize whether or not the *Battlefields to Boardrooms* finding still applies after women have separated from the very structured military culture and uniform pay scale. Further exploration could potentially inform future transition training and employment services.

Potential Pejorative Bias of Employers

Some women veterans have expressed frustration with employers' preconceived notions pertaining to veterans being dogmatic and difficult to work with (Thom & Bassuk, 2012). Interviews with employers about the perceptions and desirability of veteran candidates of either gender have resulted in both positive and negative findings (Abt Associates, Inc., 2008). In one audit study specific to women veterans' resumes compared to women non-veterans' resumes, Kleykamp (2010) found that call-back rates were higher for women veterans than women non-veterans (all other criteria being equal). However, Kleykamp (2010) also highlighted that other research suggests most veteran discrimination occurs during the interview, not at the initial screening stage. Numerous studies pertaining to gender, but not to veteran status, have shown that success and likeability are positively correlated for men and negatively correlated for women, particularly with success at tasks considered non-traditional for women (Heilman, M. E. & Okimoto, T. G., 2007; Heilman, M. E., et. al., 2004; Heilman, M. E., et. al., 1995). The potential overlap of the negative correlation between women's success at tasks traditionally performed by men and likability and sometimes negative assumptions of employers pertaining to veterans is worthy of future research and may be used to inform employer outreach and education campaigns.

Women Veterans' Labor Force Characteristics by Race and Ethnicity

In both 2013 and 2014, women veteran unemployment rates varied across race and ethnicity groups. Among women veterans, the highest unemployment rates were among Hispanics or Latinos. Among Hispanics or Latinos, women veterans had higher unemployment rates in both 2013 and 2014 than male veterans or nonveterans of either gender (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Many factors are associated with labor market differences among race and ethnicity groups, many of which are not measurable in the Current Population Survey, such as variations in educational attainment, occupation and industry, and geographical area (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014, August). Qualitative research may reveal underlying factors which could potentially inform future outreach efforts.

Longitudinal Research on Women Veterans and Employment

In their 2007 survey of the career transitions of women veterans, the Business and Professional Women's Foundation (2008) found that the transition into the civilian workforce is a multidimensional process that continues beyond a woman's placement in her first job after separating from the military. Future longitudinal research, following women veterans for several years after transition, may provide insights on how the impact (positive or negative) of being a veteran changes over time, and how much time elapses between military separation and major employment and/or economic challenges. Additionally, following the same women over time would allow researchers to collect evidence-based data on the programs and services that prove to be long-term solutions. Because the military-to-civilian transition is ultimately a career transition, it may be useful to include a comparison group of non-veteran women making major changes in their

career field and occupation. Findings may inform future policy regarding veteran employment services and outreach.

For additional information, contact the DOL VETS Women Veteran Program Manager at (202) 693-4700.

<http://www.dol.gov/vets/womenveterans>.



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