

Women Military Veterans, Disability, and Employment

AUTHORS: Anastasia Prokos, Ph.D.
LeAnn N. Cabage, Ph.D.

DATE: 2015

PUBLICATION: *Armed Forces & Society*, 1-22; First published online October 16, 2015.

PUBLICATION TYPE: Peer-Reviewed Journal Article

PUBLICATION LINK: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0095327X15610743>

KEYWORDS: Veterans, disability, employment, women

ABSTRACT

“This study contributes to the growing body of literature about women veterans of the U.S. military by investigating how veteran status and disability are related to women’s ability to work. The study uses nationally representative data to analyze labor market outcomes of women who served in the U.S. military since 1973, with a focus on findings about women who have served since 2001. Results indicate women who served after 2001 are more likely to have a disability when compared to men veterans and women nonveterans. Those women veterans who do not have a disability are more likely to be employed than their nonveteran counterparts, net of controls for demographic factors. Disability, including service-related disability, is strongly related to unemployment and being out of the labor force. The discussion considers the implications of women’s military service for their ability to work.”

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

- Despite the increase in the number of women in the U.S. military in the last 40 years and the expansion of women’s roles, research on the effects of veteran status on employment among women is still minimal. Contributing to this gap in literature, this study compares the disability status of women veterans to nonveterans and men veterans. The association between veteran status, disability, and employment status for post 9/11 women veterans is then tested.
- Using American Community Survey data pooled from 2008, 2009, and 2010, the authors tested two hypotheses: 1) women veterans will be more likely than their nonveteran counterparts to report a functional disability and 2) women veterans will be more likely than their male veteran counterparts to report a service-related disability. The findings were in contradiction with hypothesis 1; women veterans were less likely to report a disability than their nonveteran counterparts. However, the results generally supported hypothesis 2; with the exception of Vietnam era veterans and veterans who served in the last year, women veterans were more likely than their male veteran counterparts to report a service-related disability.
- Approximately 20.6% of women veterans reported a service-related disability, compared to 16.6% of men veterans. Since reporting a disability is linked with greater odds of being out of the labor force, and more women veterans report a service-related disability than men veterans, there is an increased need for data on the labor force to collect information on disability status.

IMPLICATIONS

FOR PRACTICE

This study serves as an important reminder that the dramatic increase in women's participation in the military and their changing roles in military service have implications for employers, social service providers, families, and communities. Women veterans with a service-related disability who are seeking jobs should utilize tools that help them translate their military experience and skills to civilian occupations. Both women and men veterans with a service-related disability who are involved in the civilian labor force should familiarize themselves with their employment rights under the American with Disabilities Act (ADA). Veterans with a service related disability interested in employment should seek and utilize the many services available to assist them in gaining employment and/or becoming a business owner. In recent years more attention has been placed on employing veterans with service-related disabilities. Employers should continue hiring veterans with service-related disabilities and participate in events that assist veterans with service-related disabilities gain employment. Employers interested in hiring veterans with service-related disabilities should continue efforts to recruit qualified applicants. Employers should familiarize themselves with guides for employers offered by ADA and the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA). Such guides could help employers help their veteran employee(s) with a service-related disability succeed at the company.

FOR POLICY

Based on the finding that women veterans report a service-related disability at a higher occurrence than male veterans, the Department of Labor (DOL) might continue enforcing federal laws to protect and assist veterans with service-related disabilities gain employment in the civilian workforce. Additionally, since service-related disability status was found to be related to employment status among women, the VA and the DOL might partner to assist women veterans in obtaining jobs and translating skills to the workforce. The DOL and the VA might continue researching how to best serve veterans with a service-related disability who are seeking employment. Since not all veterans will admit to having a service-related disability, it might be beneficial for the VA to review service-related disability employment rights to every veteran, regardless of disability status.

FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on the findings presented in the paper, it is imperative that future studies on veterans and employment account for women's (or men's) disability status, including disability that is connected to military service. The percentage of both veterans and nonveterans who reported a functional disability was lower in this sample than government statistics indicate, likely because only noninstitutionalized populations are including in ACS. Since persons who experience military trauma could be more likely to be hospitalized or in other forms of institutional care within the first year of leaving the military, future researchers should use data that includes institutionalized populations. Given that women veterans are a growing segment of the population, future researchers should investigate women veterans' civilian work lives to gain insight into potential long term effects on the labor market for the women and others. Researchers might use this study to inform their understanding of how both women and men veterans are dealing with a disability as they negotiate the labor market. This could help in understanding civilian employment patterns and earnings differentials. Future research should study the level and type of disability many women veterans have to better uncover how the disabilities affect their work lives and financial security. A limitation of this study is that it lacked a detailed breakdown of military experience. Future researchers should analyze data with a more detailed breakdown of military experience, including branch of service and service in the military reserves. Future research should on labor market outcomes should account for potential injuries gotten during military service.

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Anastasia Prokos, Ph.D.¹

LeAnn N. Cabage, Ph.D.²

¹ aprokos@iastate.edu; Department of Sociology, Iowa State University

² Department of Sociology, Iowa State University