

A Great Place to Start? The Effect of Prior Military Service on Hiring

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ABSTRACT

“This article examines the effect of prior military service on hiring for entry-level jobs in a major metropolitan labor market. The research employs an audit method in which resumes differing only in the presentation of military experience versus civilian work experience are faxed in response to an advertised position. Results suggest that employers exhibit preferential treatment of black military veterans with transferable skills over black nonveterans. Veterans with traditional military experience in the combat arms do not experience preferential treatment by employers, regardless of racial/ethnic background. These findings suggest a possible mechanism generating the post military employment benefit among blacks found in prior observational studies. A veteran premium in hiring may stem from the concentration of blacks in military occupational specialties with a high degree of civilian transferability, combined with employer preferences for military veterans with such work experience over their nonveteran peers.”

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

- The purpose of this study was to analyze how different types of military training and military work experience impact the hiring of veterans compared to comparable civilians. This research involved sending fictitious resumes with and without military experience to real job advertisements.
- Kleykamp found that veterans were called back at the same or higher rates than nonveterans when their military experience was highly transferrable.
- Veterans who served in combat arms positions had lower callback rates than those who had administrative military experience. Employers treated veterans without transferable civilian skills less favorably during the hiring process than nonveterans with administrative experience. However, African American and Hispanic veterans with administrative experience were called back at slightly higher rates than their civilian peers.
- White and Hispanic veterans serving in the combat arms were called back for an interview at higher rates than their African American peers.

IMPLICATIONS

FOR PRACTICE

To prepare themselves for the civilian job market, veterans should work with a career counselor to identify the attributes, skills, and experiences they could bring to an organization, especially those who served in the combat arms, with less direct transferability to civilian jobs. The results of this study imply that many of the skills attained during military service can greatly impact the civilian sector, including work ethics, time management, effective communication, and teamwork, when veterans have clearly transferrable military occupations. Veterans who served in less transferrable specialties should take advantage of re-training or education opportunities to improve their employment opportunities. Military recruiters should discuss potential transferable skills with potential recruits. To ensure employers maximize the unique skillset and experiences many veterans possess, employers should consider partaking in opportunities to learn more about veterans in the civilian workforce and what they can offer employers. Learning more about veterans' skills can add great value to the civilian workforce. For example, veterans with combat experience have been shown to be excellent entrepreneurs because of their propensity for risk-taking. Local networks, such as the Greater Philadelphia Veterans Network (GPVN) have been helped connect qualified veterans with perspective employers. Other local networks serving veterans should consider helping connect recruiters and perspective employers with qualified veterans. Firms aiming for more veteran-friendly hiring practices should familiarize themselves with the 100,000 Jobs Mission. The 100,000 Jobs Mission has been integral at helping connect veterans of all military backgrounds to some of the top U.S. companies.

FOR POLICY

The Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of Labor (DoL) might be proactive in augmenting the skill development and hiring prospects for all veterans. Since many civilian employers view military service as a high-quality human capital investment, and are eager to hire veteran candidates, the DoL and its Transition Assistance Program (TAP) might further educate veterans on how to translate military skills and expertise into marketable skills for the civilian workforce. Since veterans with fewer or no transferable work experience, such as those in combat arms positions, generally experienced less favorable hiring treatments, the DoD and the DoL might collaborate to help these veterans attain more transferable skills or become business owners. For example, since veterans in combat roles are known to be effective risk-takers, the DoD and the DoL might provide information to veterans on entrepreneurship. Since National Guard and Reserves service members often experience difficulty finding civilian employment upon return from active duty, the DoD and the DoL might create an advocacy body to help educate perspective civilian employers on the many skills and talents of members who have served in the National Guard and Reserves.

FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study highlights the need for further research on the National Guard and Reserves, particularly their deployment and transition experiences. Since some previous studies have found that National Guard and Reserves service members often experience distinct discrimination, future studies on this population should document the hiring process and workplace treatment. Understanding workplace treatment is especially important given that many National Guard and Reserves members have deployed to active duty. A limitation of this study is that gender was not included in this analysis. Given that hiring experiences can differ for men and women, it is critical that future studies examine veteran hiring practices by gender and different military roles. Another limitation of this study is that the overall callback rates were low. To allow for more confident and statistically significant findings, future researchers should strive for higher callback rates or conduct studies at a larger scale. Given that Hispanic veterans have a unique experience with civilian hiring, future research is needed to understand why there were major differences in hiring between Hispanics and the rest of the survey participants.

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