

Post-9/11 Women Veterans

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Introduction

The role of women in the U.S. military has expanded greatly since the inception of the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) in 1973. Significant changes in legislation and policy in the early 1990s opened up occupational opportunities for active-duty women. According to Department of Defense data, over 80 percent of the services' career positions are now open to women (GAO 1999). These changes allowed them to fly combat aircraft, serve on combat ships, and serve in combat-related occupations.

In addition to these policy changes, the nature of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan has redefined the experience of women serving in the Armed Forces. The Persian Gulf War of 1991 saw what was then the largest deployment of women in U.S. military history, with approximately 41,000 women deployed to the region (GAO 1999). Since 2002, an unprecedented 155,000 women have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan (PBS.org). As these conflicts have grown longer and the need for soldiers has increased, the rules governing which jobs can be performed by women in the military have changed to meet these needs (PBS.org).

Today's military women represent a generational shift. They no longer face the same challenges as their predecessors. Not only is the representation of women in the AVF increasing, but the demographics of these women are also changing. Military women are more likely to be members of a racial minority than military men (DoD 2005). They are less likely to be married than their male counterparts. Servicewomen are increasingly being assigned to more "non-traditional" jobs.

Objective

The purpose of this analysis is to investigate how this new generation of women veterans who served in the Armed Forces only after the events of September 11, 2001 is different from their AVF-predecessors who served between the end of the Vietnam Era and 1990, in terms of their post-military social and economic outcomes. This analysis also compares Post-9/11 women veterans to their similarly-aged nonveteran counterparts.

Data

This analysis uses data from the 2008 American Community Survey (ACS) and the 1990 decennial census. The ACS is a continuous survey that collects detailed person-level data from a nationally-representative sample of 3 million household addresses a year and offers a unique opportunity to study female veterans in fine detail.

The 1990 decennial census data were used to facilitate the analysis of the two cohorts of veterans. The 1990 data provide information on women veterans from the early part of the AVF-period who are close in age and in the amount of time since their separation from the military to the most recent cohort of women veterans from the Post-9/11 era. The universe for this analysis is women between the ages of 18 to 34 years from each data source.

“Post 9/11 women veterans” are those women in the 2008 ACS sample who served all of their time in the military after the events of September 11, 2001. Women who served prior to September 11, 2001 are excluded from the analysis. “Early AVF veterans” are those women in the 1990 decennial sample who served all of their time in the military after the end of conscription (post Vietnam Era) in 1973. Women who served prior to 1973 are excluded from the analysis. “Nonveterans” in this analysis are those women in the 2008 ACS sample

who have never served in the military. Nonveterans from the 1990 decennial sample were included as a comparison group in some parts of the analysis and are labeled as “Nonveterans (1990)” where included.

Methods

This analysis primarily uses descriptive statistics to compare Post- 9/11 women veterans to women veterans who served in the early part of the AVF-period as well as to nonveteran women of the same ages. Comparisons were made for a variety of demographic, social, and economic characteristics at the nation level. Multivariate analysis was used to examine the labor force participation and earnings of Post-9/11 women veterans and their nonveteran counterparts 18 to 34 years old. All comparative statements have undergone statistical testing and are significant at the 90 percent confidence level unless otherwise noted.

Research Questions

There were two research questions for this analysis:

- (1) How do women who served in the military only after September 11, 2001 differ from their predecessors who served in the early part of the AVF and how do they differ from their present-day nonveteran counterparts?
- (2) How have 20 years of policy changes affected the post-military outcomes of women veterans?

Findings

Demographic Changes 1990 to 2008

The demographics of women veterans are changing as the population of the women entering the military becomes more diverse. Fifty-seven percent of Post 9/11 women veterans

were White, not Hispanic compared with 72 percent of the Early AVF veterans and 60 percent of nonveteran women. Twenty-three percent of Post 9/11 women veterans were Black. According to Department of Defense data, women entering the military today are more likely to be members of a racial minority than military men. Research suggests that some minorities find the military to be a viable way to escape poor labor market prospects as well as a mechanism to obtain training and funds for education (Quester and Gilroy 2002).

Post 9/11 women veterans were more educated than women veterans from the Early AVF period. Sixty percent of Post 9/11 women veterans had completed some college or an associate's degree compared with 49 percent of Early AVF veterans. Of those women, 46 percent of Post 9/11 veterans were enrolled in school, compared with 28 percent of the Early AVF women in 1990. This could indicate that Post 9/11 women veterans were more likely to use their GI Bill benefits than Early AVF veterans. Sixteen percent of Post 9/11 veterans had completed a Bachelor's degree or higher compared with 13 percent of the Early AVF veterans. While Post 9/11 veterans exceeded the educational attainment of the Early AVF veterans, they lagged behind their nonveteran counterparts. Twenty-four percent of nonveteran women in the 2008 ACS sample had a Bachelor's degree or higher.

Post 9/11 women veterans were less likely to be married than were Early AVF veterans (38 percent compared with 54 percent respectively). While the percentage of married Post 9/11 veterans was more similar to that of nonveteran women in 2008 than to veterans in 1990, the percentage of previously married Post 9/11 women veterans was higher than that of nonveterans. Sixteen percent of Post 9/11 women were divorced, widowed, or separated in 2008, compared with 7 percent of nonveteran women. Nonveteran women were

more likely to have never been married at all (59 percent compared with 47 percent of Post 9/11 women veterans and 26 percent of Early AVF women veterans).

Post-military Outcomes 1990 to 2008

Changes in the kinds of occupations women may hold while in the military could be expected to have some impact on the kinds of occupations in which they work post-military. Servicewomen are increasingly being assigned to more “nontraditional” jobs (GAO 1999). “Military” occupations are those jobs specific to the Armed Forces, such as tactical operations and weapons specialists. In 1990, 19 percent of women on active duty worked in military occupations. In 2008, that percentage had increased to 40 percent. Much of that difference is attributable to the current wars. As the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan grow longer, the rules governing which jobs can be performed by women has changed to meet those needs (PBS.org). Women on active duty during peacetime in 1990 typically worked in management and professional, sales and office, and production, transportation, and material moving occupations while in the military.

Employed women who were veterans of the Early AVF in 1990 worked in occupations similar to the women on active duty at that time, management and professional, sales and office, and production, transportation, and material moving. Post 9/11 women veterans in 2008 worked in occupations similar to their nonveteran counterparts, sales and office, management and professional, and service. Some of these changes between the veteran groups can be explained by job losses and gains in specific occupations over time. Manufacturing, production, and material moving jobs have decreased since 1990 while service jobs have increased (Abraham and Spletzer 2009).

The occupations of employed women veterans and nonveterans differed by race and Hispanic origin.¹ A lower percentage of White non-Hispanic Post 9/11 women veterans were in management, professional, and related occupations than White non-Hispanic nonveterans in 2008 (30 percent compared with 36 percent). A higher percentage of White non-Hispanic Post 9/11 veterans were in service occupations compared with both Early AVF veterans and their nonveteran counterparts (29 percent compared with 17 percent and 25 percent, respectively). A lower percentage of Black and Hispanic Post 9/11 veterans worked in service occupations compared with nonveterans in 2008 (21 percent compared with 27 percent and 17 percent compared with 27 percent, respectively). Research has suggested that some of the benefits of military service allow minority women to keep pace with their nonveteran counterparts while white women veterans appear to lose ground relative to white nonveterans (Cooney et al. 2003).

About 30 percent of Early AVF veterans in 1990 and of Post 9/11 veterans and nonveterans in 2008 were nonemployed, meaning they were either unemployed or not in the labor force. The proportions of women who were unemployed and not in labor force differed by age. Forty-six percent of all nonemployed Post 9/11 women veterans were between 18 and 24 years old, compared with 24 percent of nonemployed Early AVF women veterans and 51 percent of all nonemployed nonveterans. Of those nonemployed 18 to 24 year old women, 25 percent of Early AVF veterans, 34 percent of Post 9/11 veterans, and 48 percent of nonveterans were enrolled in school. Since veterans were typically serving in the military during the ages when most young adults are enrolled in college, it is to be expected that those veterans who enroll in school do so at older ages. Forty-five percent of nonemployed 25- to 29-year-old and 27 percent of 30- to 34-year-old Post 9/11 veterans were enrolled in school,

¹ There were no statistically significant differences between occupations for “Other non-Hispanic” women.

compared with 16 percent and 9 percent, respectively, of similarly-aged nonveterans. The finding that Early AVF veterans were more likely to be nonemployed at older ages than were Post 9/11 women veterans and that nonemployed Early AVF veterans were not enrolled in school at the same rates as the nonemployed Post 9/11 veterans suggest Early AVF women were out of the labor force for different reasons than were Post 9/11 veterans. They may have been out of the labor force by choice to raise their families while Post 9/11 veterans are out of the labor force because they could not find jobs and used the opportunity to take advantage of their GI Bill benefits.

About 36 percent of nonemployed Post 9/11 veterans reported “military” as their last occupation. Of these women, 59 percent were 18 to 24 years old. Half of the nonemployed Post 9/11 women veterans had worked at some point in the 12 months prior to their interview, compared with 24 percent of Early AVF veterans and 36 percent of nonveteran women. Thirty-seven percent of nonveteran who were not in the labor force at all worked over five years ago or never worked, higher than the 13 percent of both groups of veterans.

A higher percentage of Early AVF veterans than nonveterans in 1990 and a higher percentage of Post 9/11 veterans than nonveterans in 2008 worked in male-dominated occupations (17 percent compared with 9 percent and 13 percent compared with 7 percent, respectively). A male-dominated occupation is one in which the percentage of women is less than 30. While the percentages for both veterans groups was higher than their nonveteran counterparts, fewer Post 9/11 women veterans were working in male-dominated occupations than their predecessors. The specific types of jobs these women worked in, across years, are similar. Regardless of veteran status, employed women in 1990 and 2008 were working as secretaries, registered nurses, waitresses, teachers, and managers. One job that stood out for

Post 9/11 women veterans was security guard. This may be a job that allows for an easy transfer of skills from a military-specific occupation.

When the median earnings of Early AVF women veterans who worked year-round fulltime were inflated into 2008 dollars, they were not statistically different than those of Post 9/11 women veterans (\$27,797 compared with \$29,346). The median earnings of Post 9/11 women veterans who worked year-round, full-time were also not statistically different from those of nonveteran women in 2008 (\$29,346 compared with \$30,261). However, the results change when earnings are analyzed using OLS regression. Controlling only for basic demographic characteristics, women veterans 18 to 34 years old earned 17 percent more than similar nonveteran women in 2008. When weeks and hours are included in the model, women veterans still earned more, about 7 percent, however the longer hours they worked on average explains most of this earnings gap. Post 9/11 women veterans were 1.9 times more likely than nonveterans in 2008 to work fulltime hours.

Prior research on the earnings of women veterans has typically found an earning advantage for minority veterans (Gottschalck and Holder 2009). While this was the case in 1990, it did not hold true for the 2008 ACS sample. In 1990, black veterans of the Early AVF period earned 18 percent more than black nonveteran women. Whether the lack of an earnings advantage for the Post 9/11 women veterans is a result of the policy changes regarding military occupations for women or the effects of the current economy cannot be definitively determined with these data. When the same model is run using data from the 2006 ACS, prior to the recent recession, black women veterans who served in the Post 9/11 era earned 20 percent more than black nonveterans.

Conclusions

Women who served on active duty after the events of September 11, 2001 differ in many respects from their Early AVF predecessors. The Post 9/11 veterans are more racially diverse than their predecessors. They are more likely to have never been married and to have completed more education than women from the Early AVF period. The new GI Bill benefits enacted in 2008 may help make this the most educated cohort of women veterans.

Post 9/11 women veterans also differ from nonveterans. They are more likely than their nonveteran counterparts to be Black. A higher percentage of Post 9/11 women veterans are divorced than nonveteran women in 2008. While these veterans are more educated than their predecessors, they are less educated than women 18 to 34 years old who have never served in the military. Post 9/11 women veterans were serving in the military during the ages when most young women were attending college. Given their high rates of enrollment, this cohort of veterans may catch up to the educational attainment of nonveterans as they age.

Research has suggested that military experience is a close substitute for civilian labor market experience in occupation groups where training is the most transferable (medical, equipment repair, etc.) while not so for occupations where training is least transferable (infantry, combat) (Goldberg and Warner 1987). Veterans may face temporary employment problems as they first enter the labor market after their military enlistment ends due to imperfect knowledge of the civilian job market and difficulty translating military skills into civilian terms for employers. Post 9/11 veterans are also entering into a difficult job market. Their high unemployment rate indicates that they are actively looking for work but are unable

to find a job. Nonveterans are facing similar problems as the current economic crisis is differentially affecting workers by age, with younger workers being among the hardest hit.

Women veterans from the Post 9/11 era who served in nontraditional military-related occupations while in the service may be at an increased disadvantage compared with Early AVF women veterans who were banned from such jobs. With the exception of security guard jobs, Post 9/11 women veterans are working in the same kinds of occupations as both their predecessors and their nonveteran counterparts. The most common occupations are traditional female-dominated occupations, such as secretary, registered nurse, and waitress. Women serving in the military may be doing jobs similar to military men, as the policies change regarding occupations, but women veterans are doing jobs similar to all other women. These findings may suggest difficulty transferring skills learned in male-dominated, and war-related, military occupations.

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