

Women Veterans in Transition

A Research Project of Business and Professional Women's Foundation



Building Strong Programs and Policies to Support Women Veterans

A Briefing Paper from the Women Veterans in Transition Pilot Research Study
by Business and Professional Women's Foundation

A one-size fits all approach to programs and policies that support women veterans transitioning from the military into the civilian workforce does not reflect the full diversity of their experiences, responsibilities and resources. Decision makers should look at numerous factors to help craft programs and services that more fully support women veterans in transition. Education levels, marital status and responsibility for dependents are all factors that play varying roles in determining the success of a woman veteran's transition.

Additionally, separation from the military and entry into the civilian workforce is often viewed as a time-limited event by those providing transition supports. An initial look at the results of the 2007 survey of women veterans by BPW Foundation indicates that the transition from the military into the civilian workforce is actually a multi-dimensional process for women veterans. This reality has implications not only for the types of resources needed by women veterans as they transition but also the timing and duration of those resources.

The number of women veterans increased from 1.1 million to 1.7 million between 1980 and 2007. As the number of women veterans in the U.S. population increases, ensuring the effectiveness of policies meant to engage this growing and often-highly skilled segment of workers will achieve greater economic importance.

This issue brief will focus on implications drawn from a pilot study undertaken by Business and Professional Women's (BPW) Foundation, *The 2007 Women Veterans in Transition Research Project*, to provide ideas to decision makers on new ways to approach current and future programs and policies in support of women veterans.

For example, while the official physical separation occurs within a limited time frame, results from a recent survey of women veterans indicates that the psychological transition can take place over an extended period of time – even for those who have successfully secured post-military employment. Standardized transition activities may not take into account the full breadth and range of the needs of women veterans. Additionally, certain characteristics of women veterans, such as marital status or education level, seem to play a significant role in determining the choices made during the transition between the military and the civilian workforce. Those choices appear to impact the overall success of career transitions among the women veterans surveyed.

The results of this pilot study have implications for women veterans as well as a wider range of workers. By understanding what makes a successful career transition for women veterans, it is believed we can learn what resources and supports are useful within the career transitions experienced by many different types of workers. Many issues important to women veterans as they transition, such as work-life balance and equitable compensation, are important to a diverse cross-section of workers. It is believed that by highlighting ideas that create sustainable and successful programs and policies for women veterans in the workplace these same programs will be of benefit to a larger pool of workers.

This Issue Brief Will Cover:

- What are Current Programs & Policies Specific To Women Veterans?
- What Do Women Veterans Say They Want/Need?
- What Are Women Veterans' Real Transition Experiences?
- What Are The Implications for Decision Makers?
- What Questions Should be Asked When Assessing Current and Pending Programs and Policies?

What Do Women Veterans Say They Want/Need?

As women veterans enter the civilian workforce, they say they desire the same things from the workplace as other workingwomen and experience many of the same challenges. Over half of all women veterans surveyed by BPW Foundation were married at the time they separated from the military, and similarly over half had dependents at the time of their separation. About half of women veterans in the survey reported they were the primary earners in their household.

Respondents to BPW Foundation's 2007 survey of women veterans stated that when they left the military, they sought workplaces that offered fair compensation relative to male counterparts, opportunities for advancement, training and professional development opportunities, family leave options, health/dental insurance, flexible work schedules, retirement plans and paid vacations.

What are Programs & Policies Specific To Women Veterans?

Programs and policies that support the career transition needs of veterans exist. This section will provide examples of those programs to provide advocates and decision makers a view of the current landscape. Many of these programs target the wider population of veterans. The list of policies includes both pending and current public policy.

Women make up 15 percent of the active military and are a growing segment of the veteran population. However, many programs and policies were set up to meet the needs of male veterans from a different era. Shaping programs and policies to meet the needs of a new generation of veterans while maintaining strong support for existing veterans will be an ongoing challenge for decision makers in the first half of the 21st Century.

Program Examples

Military OneSource— is a public-private interface between the Department of Defense (DOD) and Ceridian Corporation to provide overall life assistance to all service members and their loved ones. DoD contracted with Ceridian to provide a live-toll-free number 24 hours a day to offer information and referral services on anything from child care, to elder care to programs and supports for transitioning service members. For more information visit, www.militaryonesource.com

Transition Assistance Program—under federal law¹, personnel transitioning from the military have a four-part transition process available to them. The Transition Assistance Program (TAP) is offered under a partnership between the Department of Defense, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Homeland Security (e.g. the Coast Guard), and the U.S. Department of Labor. Retiring veterans have 24 months prior to their discharge to access the TAP, and those separating from the military (i.e. ending a tour of duty or coming to the end of a contracted enlistment) have 12 months prior to access TAP. The four steps include: mandatory pre-separation counseling offered by the DOD, an optional two-and-a-half day TAP Employment workshop offered by the DOL-Veterans' Employment & Training Services, a four-hour VA briefing on veteran's benefits, and a two-hour VA briefing conducted specifically for those with service-connected disabilities.

Members of the Guard and Reserve arms of the armed services demobilize back to their guard and reserve units in their home states, which may not have a standing TAP program such as those found on military bases. Units demobilizing have time constraints as well as mandatory aspects to their demobilization that can make participating in a TAP program problematic. The availability of the TAP program may also vary based upon the state to which the unit belongs. A number of states offer a mini-TAP that is a half day or one day program. Find out more at <http://www.transitionassistanceprogram.com/register.tpp>.

Women Joining Forces— The *Women Joining Forces* program (WJF) was created by Business and Professional Women/USA to assist women veterans as they transition from the military into the civilian workforce and life. The strength of the program draws on BPW/USA's national network of business and workingwomen willing to mentor and guide women during this transition.

"BPW/USA is an organization that focuses on the career transitions of women," said Deborah Frett, CEO of BPW/USA. "Veterans share many of the same challenges as other women but many are heightened as a result of their service and separation."

Women Joining Forces – Closing Ranks, Opening Doors offers a full dues waiver for a 1-year introductory membership to women exiting military service and discounted membership to other women veterans. It also provides access to online resources such as a Connect-A-Vet listing of online veterans' services and programs, the BPW/USA Career Center which helps identify women and veteran friendly employers and a series of webinars and in-person trainings that support the individual professional development of women veterans. For more information visit, www.womenjoiningforces.org.

¹ Public Law 101-510. Title 10 Sections 1141 to 1143 and 1144 to 1150.

Policy Examples

Federal

- 1) The Military Reservist and Veteran Small Business Reauthorization and Opportunity Act** – (H.R. 4253) (S-1105) sponsored by U.S. Congressman Jason Altmire (PA-4) would expand the funding and support available to veterans pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities and make it easier for reservists to secure loans to protect their businesses while deployed. For more information see fact sheets on BPW/USA's Policy Section at www.bpwusa.org.
- 2) Montgomery GI Bill** – Under the GI Bill, active duty members of the military may receive up to 36 months of educational benefits for a wide variety of training, including an undergraduate or graduate degree at a college or university, or a cooperative training program. It also can be used for an accredited independent study program leading to a degree. Participants can receive over \$36,000 in tuition.

There is also an education assistance program for the men and women in the Selected Reserve of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard, and the Army and Air National Guard. If eligible, participants can use the MGIB-SR towards any degree programs, certificate or correspondence courses, cooperative training, independent study programs, apprenticeship/on-the-job training, and vocational flight training programs. Benefits are only for current members of the reserve or National Guard. The full-range of benefits available to veterans may vary based on the era in which they served. For more information on these programs, visit the Department of Defense website at <http://www.gibill.va.gov/>.
- 3) The Veterans Benefits Awareness Act of 2007** – (H.R. 3681) U.S. Representative John Boozman, (R-AR), the ranking Republican on the Veterans Economic Opportunity Subcommittee, introduced bipartisan legislation (The Veterans Benefits Awareness Act of 2007) that would authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to purchase advertising in national media outlets to promote awareness of benefits that are available to veterans and their dependents. Currently, the VA is NOT allowed, by law, to advertise benefits and services in the national media. For more information see <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h110-3681>. (Pending)
- 4) The Veterans Education Tuition Support Act of 2007**–(H.R.2910), sponsored by Representative Susan Davis (CA-53) and the companion bill of the same name (S. 1718) sponsored by Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH) in the Senate would amend the Service members Civil Relief Act to require colleges and universities to refund the tuition of a service member who is activated while in school and guarantee them readmission when they return. For more information see fact sheets on BPW/USA's Policy Section at www.bpwusa.org. (Pending)
- 5) Women Veterans Healthcare Improvement Act** –(H.R. 4107) sponsored by Rep. Stephanie Herseth Sandlin (D-SD), would amend title 38 of the US Code and require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) to conduct a 10-year epidemiologic study on the health of women veterans who served on active duty in the combat theatres of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). The study would be required to include information on women veterans' general health, mental health, reproductive health, and mortality. The secretary would be required to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the barriers women veterans face in accessing physical and mental health care, including perceived stigma, the effect of driving distance or availability of other forms of transportation, availability of child care, comprehension of eligibility, quality of service providers, perception of personal safety and comfort while receiving services, and providers' cultural sensitivity. The assessment would be required to report on the availability of specialized programs for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), homelessness, substance abuse, mental illness, and pregnancy care. For more information see fact sheets on BPW/USA's Policy Section at www.bpwusa.org. (Pending)

State

- 1) Texas Senate Bill 1058** – filed by Texas State Senator Royce West, the bill is meant to ensure that the state's 2-1-1 system is fully integrated with other veterans' support services to allow for easy access to critical information for veterans and their families. 2-1-1 will provide easy phone access to information about employment and other needed services to veterans. A video of the press conference in support of Senate Bill 1058 is available at <http://www.senate.state.tx.us/75r/senate/members/dist23/dist23.htm#Press>. (Pending)

What Are Women Veterans' Real Experiences?

Characteristics of Women Veterans Influence Their Civilian Employment Experiences

Women veterans possess characteristics that appear to influence their entry into and success in the civilian job market. To treat all women veterans as if they are the same overlooks additional factors that may influence what they chose to do when facing separation from the armed services.

Three of the most influential factors unrelated to their military status are focused upon in this section of the briefing paper: educational status (e.g. college-educated or not), marital status at the time of separation and the presence of or lack of dependents. Implications drawn from this analysis for decision makers include the need to take into account the differing motivations and resources of women veterans seeking post-military employment.

The three factors examined below are educational status (had at least a 4-year college degree vs. those without such a degree at the time of separation); marital status (married vs. non-married at the time of separation from the military); and dependents (with vs. without dependents at the time of separation).

Having a college degree had a significant impact on how women veterans in the 2007 BPW Foundation survey said they approached separation from the military, with about 40 percent of women veterans surveyed having a college degree at separation. A much larger percentage of college-educated women veterans began their job search prior to leaving the military compared to those who did not have a college degree, 64 percent to 42 percent. About 80 percent of both groups found employment in the civilian workforce, but those with a college degree not only found a job sooner (six months compared to nine months), they also reported finding *the right job* at a higher rate, 37 percent to 26 percent. Those with a college degree were also more likely to say their military experience gave them an advantage in the workplace (63 percent to 50 percent), more likely to indicate they had found employers who appreciated their service to their country (62 percent to 56 percent) and more likely to say they found employers who valued their military training (61 percent to 52 percent).

Likewise, being married also appeared to influence civilian job activities and success, with about half of all women veterans surveyed married at their military separation. About 80 percent of each group found civilian employment. Married and unmarried women veterans began their civilian job search in similar manners with about half of both groups starting prior to separation, but unmarried women veterans in the survey both found a job more quickly (6 months compared to 10 months), they also found jobs they said they liked at a higher rate (34 percent to 29 percent). Unmarried women veterans were more likely to talk about their military careers during job interviews (58 percent to 50 percent) and were more likely to think their military experience gave them an advantage in the workplace (58 percent to 53 percent). This raises the question: What is behind this difference? Current data does not answer this question, but it is a topic being considered for additional research.

Finally, having dependents appears to impact women veterans' work experiences. About 53 percent of women veterans reported having dependents at the time of separation, and about 79 percent of those veterans entered the civilian workforce. This was at a slower rate than for the 47 percent of veterans without dependents, 83 percent of whom found civilian employment by the time of the survey. Members of both groups took about seven months to find a civilian job, but a higher percentage of those with dependents started their job searches while still in the military, 56 percent to 47 percent. About 30 percent of both groups of women veterans reported finding the right job.

As important a role as each of the three factors has individually on the responses of women veterans, it is also important to see how possessing more than one trait at a time can impact the choices made by women veterans.

In general, women veterans surveyed were more likely to report being satisfied with their first post-military position if they had taken the following actions:

- Began looking for a job before they left the military
- Participated in the Transition Assistance Employment Workshop (TAP) before leaving the military
- Expressed high-levels of comfort with job skills learned in the military
- Worked with a mentor during the during the job search
- Took classes to improve job-specific skills
- Took in person or online classes on job search skills
- Attended job fairs
- Found a job in the government or nonprofit sector
- Found an employer who displayed a high-level of appreciation for their military service

Understanding the impact of the interactions among the three factors on women veterans' choices can help decision makers set programs and policies to address the particular strengths and weaknesses of groups of women veterans who

leave the military with very different personal circumstances. It will help decision makers understand which veterans are more likely to engage in activities that lead to successful transitions. The three factors examined are binary variables, each having a yes or no answer and can be combined into eight analysis cells as shown below, each of which is examined separately in this section. Please note that any one woman veteran can fall into one and only one group.

Women Veterans Analysis Groups				
	College	Married	Dependents	Percent
Group 1	No	No	No	18 percent
Group 2	No	No	Yes	11 percent
Group 3	No	Yes	No	10 percent
Group 4	No	Yes	Yes	19 percent
Group 5	Yes	No	No	13 percent
Group 6	Yes	No	Yes	7 percent
Group 7	Yes	Yes	No	6 percent
Group 8	Yes	Yes	Yes	17 percent

The analysis of each group highlights areas in which each is different from the entire group of women veterans *excluding the group under examination*. That is, the comparison group for any one group (Groups 1 to 8) is composed of all women veterans who are not part of that group. The results are presented in table form for ease of reading, followed by a discussion of the implications of the results taken as a whole. Note the focus of the discussion is not to see how each group compares to the others, but to highlight the areas in which each group demonstrates unique needs². The same seven items are examined within each group.

Group 1: No College, Not Married, No Dependents

Women veterans in Group 1 represent 18 percent of all women veterans who responded to the 2007 Women Veterans in Transition Survey. On average, they were in the military seven years. This is the second youngest of the eight groups, averaging age 27 at time of separation. On average, they took seven months to find their first civilian job. Of the members of this group, 86 percent have held a civilian job.

Category	Percent of Group 1	Percent of All Other Woman Veterans	Comparison to All Other Women Veterans
Started the job search prior to leaving the military	39 percent	55 percent	Much Lower
Thought their first job was just what they were looking for	25 percent	32 percent	Much Lower
Thought their employers appreciated their service to their country	57 percent	59 percent	Same
Thought their military experience gave them an advantage in the marketplace	50 percent	57 percent	Much Lower
Thought their first employer valued the skills they learned in the military	51 percent	58 percent	Much Lower
Felt that being able to think in military terms helped them in this job	46 percent	55 percent	Much Lower
Believed this job demanded very different skills than the ones learned in the military	40 percent	32 percent	Much Higher

Group 1 women veterans could benefit from focused and targeted support during their transition. They do not appear to be as successful as their counterparts in securing jobs in a timely manner or feeling positive about their first post-military position. This group appears to be younger and less well-educated than other groups and does not express the same level of motivation for their job search. Group 1 veterans start their civilian job search late and don't see how being in the military has given them something to offer civilian employers. They report feeling less successful as part of the civilian workforce, and generally view their lives as being less meaningful. They may benefit from programs and policies that emphasize additional education, job search skills and help in understanding how their military service is transferable to the civilian workplace.

² All percentages have been rounded. The designation of a difference between the analysis group and all women veterans is as follows: More than 6 percent Much Higher or Much Lower; between 3 percent and 6 percent, Higher or Lower; a difference of less than 3 percent is designated as Same.

Group 2: No College, Not Married, Dependents

Group 2 women veterans represent 11 percent of all women veterans participating in the survey and averaged 11 years of military service. The average age at separation for this group was 32 years old. On average, they took about 5.9 months to find their first civilian job. Of the members of this group, 83 percent have held a civilian job.

<i>Category</i>	<i>Percent of Group 2</i>	<i>Percent of All Other Woman Veterans</i>	<i>Comparison to All Other Women Veterans</i>
Started the job search prior to leaving the military	52 percent	52 percent	Same
Thought their first job was just what they were looking for	26 percent	32 percent	Much Lower
Thought their employers appreciated their service to their country	61 percent	58 percent	Higher
Thought their military experience gave them an advantage in the marketplace	55 percent	56 percent	Same
Thought their first employer valued the skills they learned in the military	58 percent	57 percent	Same
Felt that being able to think in military terms helped them in this job	53 percent	54 percent	Same
Believed this job demanded very different skills than the ones learned in the military	32 percent	34 percent	Same

Group 2 veterans differ from Group 1 veterans in only one area: these women veterans have dependents. Group 2 veterans are unmarried and lack a college education, but having dependents had a different impact on their civilian careers. Group 2 veterans were willing to take a civilian job that offered less than they were looking for, and thought their employers valued their service to their country more than did other women veterans. But, other than these two items, they are very similar all other women veterans surveyed in their job search choices and employer experiences. Providing additional opportunities to this group of women veterans post-employment to help them find more satisfactory work options could provide an additional benefit to both the veteran and their dependents.

Group 3: No College, Married, No Dependents

Group 3 women veterans represent 10 percent of all surveyed women veterans and averaged six years of military service. The average age at separation for Group 3 veterans was 26 years. Members of Group 3 had the shortest military career and were the youngest at separation. On average, they took about 11.3 months to find their first civilian job. Of the members of this group, 80 percent have held a civilian job.

<i>Category</i>	<i>Percent of Group 3</i>	<i>Percent of All Other Woman Veterans</i>	<i>Comparison to All Other Women Veterans</i>
Started the job search prior to leaving the military	36 percent	54 percent	Much Lower
Thought their first job was just what they were looking for	28 percent	32 percent	Lower
Thought their employers appreciated their service to their country	58 percent	58 percent	Same
Thought their military experience gave them an advantage in the marketplace	49 percent	56 percent	Much Lower
Thought their first employer valued the skills they learned in the military	53 percent	58 percent	Much Lower
Felt that being able to think in military terms helped them in this job	54 percent	54 percent	Same
Believed this job demanded very different skills than the ones learned in the military	26 percent	34 percent	Much Lower

Group 3 veterans, married when they left the service, were not as focused on the job search at the time of separation. Of the groups of women veterans studied, Group 3 veterans were the least inclined to start their job search prior to leaving the military, and among the least likely to say they had found the job they were looking for. They didn't report

seeing the value of their military background to their civilian job search, and they indicated their employers experienced a similar disconnect. Members of this group seemed to want less in terms of transition assistance and were less attached to the military as it related to influencing their civilian careers. Transition supports for this group may want to focus upon helping identify how their relatively short military careers have given them marketable skills.

Group 4: No College, Married, Dependents

Group 4 women veterans represent 19 percent of surveyed women veterans and averaged 11 years of military service. The average age at separation was 31 years. On average, Group 4 veterans took about 11.6 months to find their first civilian job. Seventy-nine percent of Group 4 veterans held a civilian job.

Category	Percent of Group 4	Percent of All Other Woman Veterans	Comparison to All Other Women Veterans
Started the job search prior to leaving the military	45 percent	53 percent	Much Lower
Thought their first job was just what they were looking for	27 percent	32 percent	Much Lower
Thought their employers appreciated their service to their country	51 percent	60 percent	Much Lower
Thought their military experience gave them an advantage in the marketplace	47 percent	58 percent	Much Lower
Thought their first employer valued the skills they learned in the military	52 percent	58 percent	Much Lower
Felt that being able to think in military terms helped them in this job	53 percent	54 percent	Same
Believed this job demanded very different skills than the ones learned in the military	32 percent	34 percent	Same

The women veterans in Group 4 are both married and have dependents, but lack a college degree. As with Group 3's married women veterans, they did not have a college degree at the time of separation and were less focused on their job search than women veterans in general and were less successful in finding what they considered the right job. Group 4 veterans were less likely to report seeing the value of their military experience in the marketplace and had limited success in finding a job that leveraged these experiences. Again, supports that focus on this group may look at addressing what prevents them from actively engaging in a job search as well as assisting them in understanding and translating their military experiences into civilian job skills.

Group 5: College, Not Married, No Dependents

Group 5 women veterans represent 13 percent of women veterans who responded to the survey. On average, they were in the military 15 years, and the average age at separation was 37 years. On average, Group 5 veterans took 4.7 months to find their first civilian job. Of this group, 83 percent have held a civilian job.

Category	Percent of Group 5	Percent of All Other Woman Veterans	Comparison to All Other Women Veterans
Started the job search prior to leaving the military	64 percent	50 percent	Much Higher
Thought their first job was just what they were looking for	44 percent	29 percent	Much Higher
Thought their employers appreciated their service to their country	63 percent	58 percent	Higher
Thought their military experience gave them an advantage in the marketplace	66 percent	54 percent	Much Higher
Thought their first employer valued the skills they learned in the military	66 percent	56 percent	Much Higher
Felt that being able to think in military terms helped them in this job	50 percent	54 percent	Same
Believed this job demanded very different skills than the ones learned in the military	34 percent	34 percent	Same

It is immediately evident when reviewing statistics for Group 5 women veterans that they fared better than their less well-educated counterparts in Group 1 and also better than other women veterans surveyed in general. Group 5 veterans were proactive in job searches and more particular about their employer selections. They are more likely to start their transition activities prior to separation, thus finding a job more quickly and were more successful in the civilian market.

It isn't clear from this particular analysis of survey data, what can be done to current programs and policies to better support Group 5-type veterans. Is the success of this group because current programs and policies that support veterans in transition are already structured in a way that is more beneficial to college-educated older veterans, or is it that the skills possessed by this group of women veterans allowed them to supplement any deficiencies in existing programs or services?

Group 6: College, Not Married, Dependents

Group 6 women veterans represent seven percent of survey respondents. On average, Group 6 veterans were in the military 18 years and the average age at separation was 40 years. On average, they took 3.6 months to find a first civilian job, and 78 percent of them have held a civilian job.

<i>Category</i>	<i>Percent of Group 6</i>	<i>Percent of All Other Woman Veterans</i>	<i>Comparison to All Other Women Veterans</i>
Started the job search prior to leaving the military	75 percent	50 percent	Much Higher
Thought their first job was just what they were looking for	44 percent	30 percent	Much Higher
Thought their employers appreciated their service to their country	64 percent	55 percent	Much Higher
Thought their military experience gave them an advantage in the marketplace	65 percent	55 percent	Much Higher
Thought their first employer valued the skills they learned in the military	63 percent	57 percent	Much Higher
Felt that being able to think in military terms helped them in this job	66 percent	53 percent	Much Higher
Believed this job demanded very different skills than the ones learned in the military	33 percent	34 percent	Same

Older, on average, than other women veterans in prior groups examined, their greater experiences may have had an impact on their job search decisions and on their comfort-level with transitioning back into the role of primary wage earner. Group 6 veterans—college-educated, unmarried and with dependents—reported smoother transitions into the civilian workforce. They are much more likely than other women veterans to have started their transition prior to leaving the military, to report finding a civilian position that they liked quickly, and to have found ways to build on their military experiences and the skills they learned in the military. Individuals in this group appear to be self-motivated, and seem to handle the transition process well.

It appears that current programs and policies may be well-suited to meeting the needs of this cohort of women veterans; or conversely, that they have the individual resources to independently make a successful transition regardless of existing policies or programs. This may indicate that programs and policies to support other groups of women veterans may want to focus on building up traits that resemble those held by Group 5 and 6 veterans—proactive searches, understanding of the value of military service to civilian marketplace and a willingness to seek out the “right” employer and the knowledge of how to do that.

Group 7: College, Married, No Dependents

Group 7 women veterans represent six percent of women veterans surveyed. On average, they were in the military 13 years, and the average age at separation was 35 years. They took 4.4 months to find their first civilian job, on average, with 83 percent reporting having held a civilian job.

<i>Category</i>	<i>Percent of Group 7</i>	<i>Percent of All Other Woman Veterans</i>	<i>Comparison to All Other Women Veterans</i>
Started the job search prior to leaving the military	57 percent	51 percent	Much Higher
Thought their first job was just what they were looking for	27 percent	31 percent	Lower
Thought their employers appreciated their service to their country	67 percent	58 percent	Much Higher
Thought their military experience gave them an advantage in the marketplace	60 percent	55 percent	Higher
Thought their first employer valued the skills they learned in the military	62 percent	57 percent	Higher
Felt that being able to think in military terms helped them in this job	56 percent	54 percent	Same
Believed this job demanded very different skills than the ones learned in the military	33 percent	34 percent	Same

College-educated, married and without dependents identifies key traits of this group of women veterans, whose responses indicated they were more easygoing in their approach to working in the civilian workforce. Compared to other women veterans, they are more likely to start their transition process while they are still in the service, but less likely to report finding a job that was just what they had been looking for. Group 7 women veterans appear to have a good grasp on what their military experience has done for them, and are able to communicate this successfully to employers. While this group had several types of successful experiences, they may benefit from job search training to emphasize their ability—given their skills and education—to select employers that are more satisfying.

Group 8: College, Married, Dependents

Group 8 women veterans represent 17 percent of women veterans who responded to the 2007 survey. On average, they were in the military 17 years with an average age at separation of 35 years. On average, they took 8.5 months to find their first civilian job with 77 percent reporting having held a civilian job.

<i>Category</i>	<i>Percent of Group 8</i>	<i>Percent of All Other Woman Veterans</i>	<i>Comparison to All Other Women Veterans</i>
Started the job search prior to leaving the military	63 percent	50 percent	Much Higher
Thought their first job was just what they were looking for	32 percent	31 percent	Same
Thought their employers appreciated their service to their country	57 percent	59 percent	Same
Thought their military experience gave them an advantage in the marketplace	60 percent	55 percent	Much Higher
Thought their first employer valued the skills they learned in the military	60 percent	57 percent	Higher
Felt that being able to think in military terms helped them in this job	60 percent	52 percent	Much Higher
Believed this job demanded very different skills than the ones learned in the military	32 percent	34 percent	Same

College-educated, married with children, Group 8 women veterans start their transition process prior to separation, as did all college-educated women veterans. Also, like their college-educated peers, they appear to have understood the value of their military service in the civilian marketplace and reported it gave them an advantage.

Findings and Conclusions

It is clear from the above analysis that women veterans lacking college degrees needed more support during the transition out of the military and into the civilian workforce. Their circumstances, whether married or not, appeared to present more challenges than faced by their colleagues with degrees. Lacking a college degree, these women (who also tend to be young) should be able to view military experience and their service to their country as their strongest advantage, yet they seem unable to leverage this into an advantage in the job search. Non-college-educated women veterans start their transition out of the military later than do their better-educated peers, and they take longer to find a less-than-fulfilling civilian job. Initial efforts to increase the overall success of the transition process could focus on this group of young women veterans. Women veterans in this non-college-educated cohort would greatly benefit from mentoring or skills development that assists them in using the military skills in the civilian world.

Additionally, it has been shown that no matter what their status, far too many women veterans delay their entrance into the transition process. This is especially disabling for women veterans who are unmarried and with dependents. For those women veterans that are unmarried and with dependents, BPW Foundation's analysis indicates that strong efforts should be made, and existing efforts increased, to reach these women veterans and to emphasize the critical importance of starting their job search prior to leaving the military. Building relationships among transitioning military personnel with potential employers, social and business networks in their communities and job search and/or training programs would have a significant impact on the transition success of women veterans in the most vulnerable cohorts.

From this analysis, the conclusion can be drawn that current transition processes work best for women veterans with college degrees, who tend to be older when they separate from the service. These processes appear to work less well for those in our survey with the most need: women veterans without college degrees that have had a relatively short military career and who are younger when they leave the service.

What Are The Implications for Decision Makers?

- Support efforts to increase the participation of women veterans in the Transition Assistance Program Employment Workshops and Disability TAP prior to leaving the military.³
- Understand women veterans are NOT a homogenous group and that programs and policies may need to be tailored to meet the differing needs of this diverse group of veterans.
- Help women veterans understand the importance of the skills they bring to the civilian workplace.
- Offer supports to women veterans over a broader time frame as they leave the military and adjust to the civilian workforce.
- Explore opportunities to provide a respite/transition period for women veterans as they separate from the military before they must re-enter the civilian workforce. This may be a challenge as more than half of women veterans surveyed by BPW Foundation named themselves as the primary income earners of their families.
- Understand that while what distinguishes women veterans from other workingwomen are the issues unique to their transition out of the military and their military experiences, similar to other workingwomen they must also contend with challenges associated with balancing work and care giving roles, convincing employers of the value of their skills and shouldering a substantial share of the financial responsibilities for their families. Therefore, services that enable women veterans to contend with challenges in the workplace may also be applicable to the greater population of workingwomen.
- Expand efforts by organizations and employers who want to work with former members of the military to help women identify themselves as veterans. Women veterans tend to not identify themselves as veterans and this may undermine their tendency to access the benefits and services available to them.⁴

³ Trowell-Harris, Irene. (E-mail October 12, 2007) , Director, Center for Women Veterans. According to Dr. Trowell-Harris, a DoD Command Support Memorandum signed on August 24, 2007 by Principal Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, the Honorable Michael L. Dominguez, encourages at least 85 percent participation of all veterans in TAP programs, which is a strong first step in achieving this goal.

⁴ "Bill Designed to Inform/Increase Recipients" (October 2, 2007). Retrieved October 2007 from <http://www.military.com/features/0,15240,151353,00.html>. Currently, the VA is NOT allowed, by law, to advertise benefits and services in the national media. Recently, U.S. Representative John Boozman, (R-AR), the ranking Republican on the Veterans Economic Opportunity Subcommittee, introduced bipartisan legislation (The Veterans Benefits Awareness Act of 2007) that would authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to purchase advertising in national media outlets to promote awareness of benefits that are available to veterans and their dependents.

What Questions Should be Asked When Assessing Current and Pending Programs and Policies?

- Do these programs or policies meet the needs of ALL women veterans? Are they more likely to be of benefit to women veterans who already possess strong personal and educational resources? Are they likely to benefit more vulnerable populations of women veterans?
- Women veterans are often in the position of caregiver when they return home. How could the program or policy in question better support the ability of recently transitioning veterans to have extended transition time and to help them deal with issues arising from their service while still meeting their responsibilities as a breadwinner?
- How can public organizations partner with private organizations or employers to promote and support the resources useful to women veterans in the transition process? These might include job fairs, online or in-person job searches or skills trainings.
- How can information about veteran services be made available to women veterans through employers, nonprofits and local, state and national organizations?
- Capturing information about the needs and experiences of women veterans is difficult. How could programs or policies better support the gathering of more research by government agencies or private research institutions on the experiences of women veterans?
- Women veterans have similar income levels to other workingwomen. Which efforts to ensure wage equity across industries for workingwomen in general would be of most benefit to women veterans?
- Flexible work schedules, professional development opportunities and opportunities for advancement are desired by women veterans. What do policies and programs do to help women veterans find such opportunities or help employers offer them?

Resources

Connect-A-Vet—One-stop online resource center that offers a comprehensive list of resources from government, nonprofit and for profit sources to support veterans. Find at www.womenjoiningforces.org.

Women Veterans in Transition Pilot Research Study—Ongoing research project undertaken by BPW Foundation that examines the career transition experiences of women veterans. Learn more about our research at www.bpwfoundation.org.

Center for Women Veterans—Official Department of Veterans Affairs Center that focuses on providing resources and information to women veterans. Find at <http://www1.va.gov/womenvet/>.

Harley-Davidson Foundation—a co-sponsor of the Women Veterans in Transition Pilot Research Study, The Harley-Davidson Foundation targets areas of greatest need among under-served populations to enhance the quality of life in our communities. The Foundation also supports selected national causes, including Veterans initiatives. Find at http://www.harley-davidson.com/wcm/Content/Pages/Foundation/hd_foundation.jsp?locale=en_US.

Disabled American Veterans Charitable Service Trust—a co-sponsor of the Women Veterans in Transition Pilot Research Study, DAVCST develops financial resources for the assistance, aid, maintenance, care, support and rehabilitation of disabled veterans and their dependents. Find out more at <http://www.dav.org/nsf/>.

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Understanding the Complexity of Women Veterans' Career Transitions. (October 2007) BPW Foundation. Find at www.bpwfoundation.org.

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Women Veterans: Past, Present, Future. (September 2007) Department of Veteran Affairs Office of Planning. Find at http://www1.va.gov/womenvet/docs/WomenVet_History.pdf.

Methodology

Data for this study comes from an internet-based opt-in survey of women veterans with known e-mail addresses obtained from various non-governmental sources. Therefore, the researchers caution readers to consider the extent to which the full population of women veterans might be different from those invited to participate in this study as they form opinions about the research conclusions.

Pilot Study Research Team

Chris Toppe, Ph.D. is a research and evaluation consultant in Washington, DC with a specialty in survey research. He is also an instructor in the graduate school of Georgetown University. Tricia Dwyer-Morgan is Director of Programs at BPW Foundation. Ms. Dwyer-Morgan holds a Master's degree in Public Policy from Georgetown University and a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from the University of North Texas.

Also contributing to the research project were members of BPW Foundation's Research and Education Committee (2006-2007 and 2007-2008), BPW/USA's Women Joining Forces Advisory Council and various partner organizations. For more information, see the launch report at www.bpwfoundation.org.

Notes

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