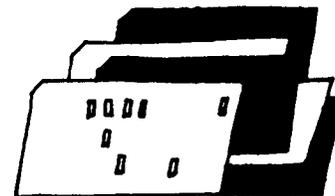


Research Summaries



Women veterans total 1 million in first half of 1986

MARIA L. ROCA

A large portion of our male population has served in the Armed Forces of the United States, and there has long been a demand for information on their post-service adjustment to the civilian labor market. Data on male veterans of World War II, for example, were published regularly by BLS in the 1940's and 1950's,¹ and population and labor force data on those who served during the Vietnam era have been published monthly since 1971. By contrast, women did not begin to serve in the Armed Forces to a significant degree until the mid-1970's. With this rise in service participation, there has been an increase in the number of women joining the veteran ranks. Beginning in January 1986, data on female veterans first became available from the Current Population Survey (CPS). This report discusses the current role of women in the military services and provides a summary of the new CPS data.

Women in the military. Women began active participation in the military during the early part of this century, with the establishment of the Army Nurse Corps in 1901 and the Navy Nurse Corps 7 years later. But, while they were recognized as military personnel, these women were denied equal rank, comparable pay, and veteran status.² It was not until the second half of the century that they began to be recruited in large numbers for a wider range of jobs providing equal pay and full veterans' benefits.

Women in the military today find a broad range of job opportunities available to them. Though many continue to serve in such traditional specialties as health and administration, others work in such diverse fields as sonar and aircraft equipment repair, radio and air traffic control, law enforcement, and meteorology. While each service has its own regulations, the only occupational restrictions women generally encounter in the military are those associated with direct combat, and so very few serve in the infantry, on gun crews, and on combat ships.³

In March 1986, the Department of Defense reported that

there were 215,000 women in the military, comprising approximately 10 percent of the total Armed Forces. In the post-Vietnam era (since 1975), the number of enlisted women has increased by 100,150 and the number of female officers by 17,200—or by 120 and 126 percent, respectively.⁴ Over this same period, the size of the total Armed Forces has changed little.

The new data. Given the small sample of female veterans in the CPS, the new data allow for little analysis of such issues as post-service employment and unemployment experience. Nevertheless, the accompanying tables provide limited labor force and population data for the average of the first 6 months of 1986; 6-month averages were used because they are somewhat more reliable than data for an individual month.

During the first half of 1986, the female veteran population averaged 1,030,000. (See table 1.) About 55 percent of these women participated in the labor force, the same proportion as for female nonveterans. The majority of female veterans served during a designated wartime period: almost 250,000 were Vietnam-era veterans, 70 percent of whom were between the ages of 30 and 39. (See table 2.) The labor force participation rate for these veterans, almost 80 percent, was higher than that of any age group of female nonveterans. The unemployed among this group averaged only 9,000 persons, yielding a jobless rate of about 5 percent. However, the sample on which such estimates are based is so small that any interpretation of these data is problematic.

About 450,000 women were veterans of other wars. These women were primarily involved in World War II and the Korean conflict and thus were mainly between the ages of 60 and 69. Because of this concentration in the older age

Table 1. Labor force status of women 18 years and over by veteran status, January-June 1986 averages

[Numbers in thousands]

Veteran status	Civilian noninstitutional population	Civilian labor force	Labor force participation rate
Total veterans	1,027	562	54.7
Vietnam-era veterans	245	193	78.8
Other war veterans	452	135	29.9
Peacetime veterans	330	234	71.0
Nonveterans	93,504	51,244	54.8

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Table 2. Age distribution of the female population 18 years and over by veteran status, January-June 1986 averages

Age	Veterans			Non-veterans
	Vietnam-era veterans	Other war veterans	Peace-time veterans	
Total (in thousands)	245	452	330	93,504
Total (in percent)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
18 to 29 years	4.5	—	52.7	26.2
30 to 39 years	69.7	—	22.1	20.7
40 to 49 years	20.0	0.9	16.4	14.1
50 to 59 years	3.3	20.4	5.2	12.2
60 to 69 years	1.2	63.1	1.2	11.5
70 years and over	1.2	15.9	2.4	11.5

groups, the labor force participation rate for “other” war veterans is relatively low, about 30 percent.

The last group identified through the survey was peacetime veterans, generally those who served between World War II and the Korean conflict, between the Korean conflict and Vietnam, and during the post-Vietnam era. In early 1986, there were 330,000 peacetime veterans, 71 percent of whom were labor force participants.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics will make the data on female veterans available upon request. □

—FOOTNOTES—

¹ See, for example, *Labor Force and Employment in 1959*, Special Labor Force Report No. 4 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1960), p. A-11.

² *Survey of Female Veterans* (Veterans’ Administration, September 1985), p. 1.

³ *Military Women in the Department of Defense* (U.S. Department of Defense, April 1985), p. 47.

⁴ Data are from the U.S. Department of Defense, Defense Manpower Data Center.

Military and civilian wives: update on the labor force gap

HOWARD V. HAYGHE

In an era when wives’ earnings are a major component of family income, many military wives experience labor market difficulties which can have a serious impact on the economic well-being of their families. This, in turn, can affect the ability of today’s all-volunteer Armed Forces to retain the highly skilled, experienced personnel that are vital to its mission.

This report updates a 1981 *Monthly Labor Review* article

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comparing the labor force patterns of military and civilian wives.¹ The recent situation is described first and is followed by a review of trends since 1970.

Status in March 1986

About 846,000 women in the United States were living on or off military posts with husbands who were members of the Armed Forces in March 1986. An additional 50,000 women were separated from their spouses because the men had been assigned to ships, overseas duty, or other posts where the family could not accompany them.²

Of the women living with their husbands 52 percent were working or looking for work, compared with 55 percent of civilian wives. However, this similarity is misleading. When the age difference between military and civilian wives is taken into account, military wives are substantially less likely to be in the labor force.

The age distribution of military wives can be estimated from that of their husbands. We know that, in general, women tend to marry men who are about 2 to 3 years older than themselves. In 1986, for example, the median age for married women, husband present, was 42.1 years, compared with a median of 44.8 years for husbands. As shown in the percent distribution below, husbands in military services are a great deal younger than their civilian counterparts.

Age	Military husbands	Civilian husbands	All wives
Total	100	100	100
16 to 19	2	—	—
20 to 24	17	4	7
25 to 34	49	23	26
35 to 44	26	23	23
45 and over	6	50	44

Thus, it can be expected that as a group, military wives are also considerably younger than all civilian wives. Indeed, virtually all are probably under 45 years of age. For the sake of consistency, labor force comparisons for military wives will be made with all wives 16 to 44 years old. (The proportion of military wives is only about 2.9 percent of all married women these ages, so their effect on labor force data pertaining to all 16- to 44-year-old wives is clearly negligible. Thus, all wives in the age group can be considered as the civilian counterparts of military wives.)

Overall, the labor force participation rate of military wives (52 percent) was nearly 15 percentage points lower than that of their civilian counterparts. Moreover, whatever their race or motherhood status, military wives were less likely than the 16- to 44-year-olds to be labor force participants. (See table 1.) For instance, white military wives had a participation rate in 1986 that was 18 percentage points lower than the rate for their civilian counterparts. Among blacks, the difference was about 11 percentage points. The presence of preschool children appeared to limit military wives’ labor force activity more sharply than that of the