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Briefly Stated



Women Veterans by the Numbers

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The purpose of this Brief is to describe the number and characteristics of women veterans in the United States and California. This information is excerpted from the CRB Report, *California's Women Veterans: The Challenges and Needs of Those Who Served*, August 2009. The full report is available at <http://www.library.ca.gov/crb/09/09-009.pdf>.

Federal and state data, when available, is provided for basic demographic characteristics. Unless otherwise identified, the data comes from the U.S. Census Bureau (VetPop 2007) and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Policy and Planning.



WOMEN IN THE MILITARY

Women have served their country in every war and conflict since the American Revolution. In the early 1900s they formally joined U.S. Armed Forces through the newly established Army Nurse Corps and Navy Nurse Corps; they also joined the Women's Army Corps and Women in the Air Force, established

in the early 1940s. By the late 1970s, women who had been joining the all volunteer military in increasing numbers were assimilated into the regular branches of the Armed Forces.

Women serve throughout the world in all branches of the U.S. Armed Forces. They represent over 14 percent of the active duty force, 17.5 percent of the National Guard and Reserve Forces, and 20 percent of new military recruits. California National Guard servicewomen represent over 14 percent of the Army National Guard and 18 percent of the Air National Guard¹. Women are assigned to more than 80 percent of all military occupational specialties and work in over 90 percent of all military career fields.

About 1.8 million troops have been deployed in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF); over 200,000 of whom are women. Combined, this is the largest wartime deployment for U.S. women.

WOMEN VETERANS

In spite of their long history of military service, women were not asked if they had ever served in the U.S. Armed Forces until the 1980 Census; 1.2 million answered that they had.

There are now over 1.8 million women veterans nationwide. Women veterans represent 7.5 percent of the total U.S. veteran population of 23.4 million.

The VA projects that the proportion of women veterans will continue to grow – to 10 percent of the total veteran population in 2020 and to almost 14 percent by 2030. This growth² is due to:

- an increasing number of women entering (and leaving) the military;

- a more favorable survival rate of women compared to men at any given age; and
- the younger age distribution of women veterans compared to male veterans.

California

California has close to 167,000 women veterans; the greatest number of female veterans of any state. They represent about eight percent of California’s overall veteran population of almost 2.1 million.

The VA projects that the percentage of women veterans in California will increase from eight percent to 11 percent of all California veterans in the next ten years, and to 14 percent in the next twenty years (by 2030).

AGE AND PERIOD OF SERVICE

Women veterans nationally are younger, on average, than their male counterparts. The estimated median age of all U.S. women veterans is 47 while that of male veterans is 61. Although the median age of women veterans is projected to steadily increase over the next two decades, women veterans are projected to remain younger than male veterans. California’s veterans reflect U.S. veterans in terms of age.

The period of service reflects the age difference described above. Women are more likely to have served in the Gulf War period (which is ongoing with OIF/OEF) and during peacetime. In contrast, the greatest number of male veterans served during the Vietnam era.

RACE AND ETHNICITY

Women veterans are more likely than their male counterparts to be from a racial or ethnic minority both nationally and in California.

On a national level, servicemembers of Hispanic ethnicity and non-White races (including multiple races) are projected to make up an increasing share of the total veteran population, with an even higher share for women veterans.

California, compared with the national level, has a larger percentage of female veterans of racial and ethnic minorities, with the exception of Black female veterans. The state is home to over 18 percent of the nation’s Hispanic female veterans, 32

percent of the nation’s Asian female veterans and over 14 percent of the nation’s female veterans identifying their race/ethnicity as multiple or other.

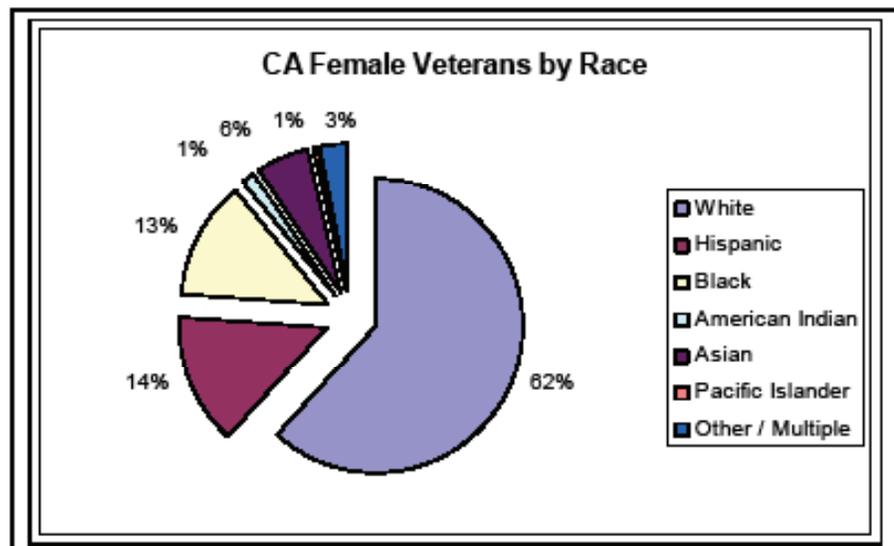
Nationally, 68 percent of female veterans are White, 20 percent are Black, seven percent are Hispanic, two percent are Asian, one percent is American Indian, less than one percent is Pacific Islander, and two percent are other/multiple race/ethnic group.

As indicated in the chart below, 62 percent of California’s female veterans are White, 14 percent are Hispanic, 13 percent are Black, six percent are Asian, one percent is American Indian, one percent is Pacific Islander, and three percent are other/multiple race/ethnic group. A California female veteran is one-third less likely to be Black than the national female veteran population. However, California has twice the percentage of Hispanic female veterans, and three times the percentage of Asian female veterans.

California Hispanic women veterans are projected to increase to nearly 15 percent in 2010 and to almost 17 percent of the total female veteran population in 2020 (in comparison with less than 14 percent and just over 16 percent for their male counterparts). Total non-white female veterans are expected to increase from less than 40 percent of the total female veteran population in 2010 to over 44 percent in 2020 (in comparison with less than 32 percent to close to 37 percent for their male counterparts).

MARITAL STATUS AND CHILDREN

Nationally, women veterans are just as likely to be married as non-veterans: 52 percent of veterans are married compared to 53 percent of non-veterans. This is the same for all age groups. It is unclear what proportion of



those who are not married were ever married.

The following data on military women may have some implications for women veterans: larger proportions of men than women servicemembers are married, but significantly greater proportions of women servicemembers are partners in dual-service marriages (both spouses are in the military): 51 percent of married women vs. eight percent of married men.³

In addition, nearly 38 percent of women in the active duty force have children, compared to 44 percent of active duty men. In comparison, women are much more likely than men to be single parents; approximately 11 percent of women in the military are single mothers compared to four percent of single military fathers.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Compared with non-veterans, U.S. veterans generally have higher levels of education in terms of having some college or an Associate of Arts (AA) degree: 34 percent for veterans vs. 27 percent for non-veterans. California veterans have higher levels of education in this area: over 39 percent of veterans have some college or an AA degree vs. 28 percent of the civilian population in the state.

Nationally, women veterans have attained higher educational levels than male veterans. Over 70 percent have some college experience, and 40 percent of these veterans have a bachelors degree. About one-quarter finish high school as the highest level of education; only four percent have no high school diploma or equivalency.

In contrast, 57 percent of male veterans have some college, including 16 percent who have a bachelors degree. Over ten percent have no high school diploma or equivalency (this difference can be explained, in part, by the older age distribution of male veterans; many male veterans entered the military service at a time when the education requirements were not as high as they have been in recent years).

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor, the overall national unemployment rate for veterans was almost four percent in 2007. Female veterans and non-veterans experienced a similar level of unemployment (4.8 vs. 4.3 percent). However, female veterans age 18-24 had twice the unemployment rate of their non-veteran counterparts (16.3 vs. 8.4 percent). In comparison, male veterans age 18-24 experience a slightly higher unemployment rate than non-veterans.

(It is important to note that 2007 employment data do not reflect the impact of the increasingly difficult economic situation and rising unemployment rates both nationally and in California.)

PERSONAL AND FAMILY INCOME

The median personal income of veterans overall is higher than non-veterans: \$41,819 compared to \$26,173. The median income for female veterans in California vs. their non-veteran counterparts is \$31,925 compared to \$21,531. However, it is much lower than that of male veterans, whose median income is \$42,416.

In general, women veterans and non-veterans have comparable family income. Women veterans are less likely than non-veterans to be at the low end of the family income distribution (ten percent vs. 14 percent have family incomes less than \$15,000). The distribution between the two groups for income from \$15,000-\$40,000 is the same; for income from \$40,000-\$75,000, the distribution of women veterans is higher than non-veterans (33 percent vs. 28 percent); and the distribution is basically the same at the high end of the scale, \$75,000 or more.

A 2008 Census study found that while women veterans had higher salaries than women with no military experience, they also worked more full-time hours. The study suggests that military education and work experience may translate into higher paying civilian jobs than women with a high school diploma would normally expect.⁴

¹ California National Guard, information received April 4, 2009).

² U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), *Women Veterans: Past, Present and Future* (Washington, DC: Office of Policy and Planning, September, 2007).

³ Department of Defense, *Population Representation in the Military Services – Active Component Enlisted Force* (Washington, DC: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, Personnel and Readiness, Fiscal Year 2004). <http://www.defenselink.mil/prhome/poprep2004>

⁴ U.S. Census, *Exploring the Veteran-Nonveteran Earnings Differential in the 2005 American Community Survey, 2008* (Washington, DC: U.S. Census, 2008). This study found that women veterans were more likely than non-veterans to work 35 or more hours per week, to work at least 50 weeks per year, and to work in public administration.