

2016

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Recommended Citation

Switzer, Simeon John-Armando (2016) "Employment Policies for Post 9/11 Veterans: Lessons Learned and a Vision for the Future," *SPNHA Review*: Vol. 12: Iss. 1, Article 9.
Available at: <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/spnhareview/vol12/iss1/9>

**EMPLOYMENT POLICIES FOR POST 9/11
VETERANS: LESSONS LEARNED AND A VISION
FOR THE FUTURE**

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine the positive aspects of governmental employment policies for veterans, with a specific focus on veterans that have deployed overseas since September 11, 2001. This research draws upon mostly statistics from the Bureau of Labor and Statistics and from the outcomes of the different governmental employment programs for veterans throughout history. The major findings of this research shows that the unemployment gap between veterans and non-veterans is significant. The analysis revealed that a community-based approach to veteran employment was most effective in aiding veterans' employment searches and positive outcomes. This research will provide valuable guidelines in developing a vision for future governmental employment policies for veterans.

INTRODUCTION

On September 11, 2001, the United States experienced a tragedy that would forever affect the future of the country. With the bombing on the Twin Towers, the United States and the rest of the world entered into a military campaign that continues to this day. Since the attacks that began what is known as the Global War on Terrorism, approximately 2.7 million servicemen and women from the U.S. Armed forces have deployed in support of military operations to Iraq and Afghanistan (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015). The financial cost of these wars has been estimated to be over \$1.6 trillion (Belasco, 2014) and over 6,800 U.S. servicemembers have lost their lives (DeBruyne & Leland, 2015).

While the loss of life and financial cost of these wars are significant, one issue that has received recent national attention is that of veteran unemployment rates. “Each year the military separates between 240,000 and 360,000 service members, according to a 2013 White House report on measures to help veterans find jobs” (Watson, 2014). Veterans are exiting the military and entering the workforce at high rates, and many have done so as our country has gone through very difficult economic times.

But for veterans of the post-9/11 generation, many returning to the civilian workforce at a time when our economy, while making progress, is still healing from the Great Recession, too many American heroes are struggling to find work. This is a critical economic challenge that requires our long-term focus, especially as in the coming years over one million service members will be hanging up their uniforms and transitioning back to civilian life. (McDonough & Sperling, 2013).

In January of 2011, unemployment rates for Gulf War II veterans (GWII: those who served after September 9, 2011) reached over 15%, while all veterans had unemployment rates of 9.9% and the civilian population saw unemployment rates of 9.6% (U.S. Department of Labor, April 2015). While veterans have accomplished great things during their military service and have gained valuable life skills that are beneficial to the workforce, they still face many struggles and challenges related to reintegration and employment. This analysis will focus on both past and current federal employment policies for veterans and address the question: What lessons can be learned from Post 9/11 veteran employment policies and how can America move forward in order to provide sustainable employment opportunities for Post 9/11 veterans?

Veteran Demographics and Employment

A veteran is defined as “a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable” (38 U.S.C. § 101, 2). While this definition is

the basis of some benefits that today's veterans receive, most benefits are contingent on the fact that the military service must fall during a war-era, as recognized by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA). Recently released veterans fall underneath the Gulf War Era, dating from "August 2, 1990 through a future date to be set by law or Presidential Proclamation" (USDVA, March 2015). As of December of 2014, the Veterans Affairs (VA) projected the U.S. veteran population to be 22 million. Approximately 18% (3.95 million) of these veterans are receiving VA compensation for Service-Connected Disabilities (SCD), with 3.3% (722,000) being diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (USDVA, 2014).

Approximately 15.6% (3.43 million) of the 22 million veterans in America have served since 9/11, with 12.3% (2.7 million) having deployed overseas to support military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The U.S. Department of Labor (March 2015) reported that 29% (928,000) of GWII veterans reported a Service-Connected Disability. Table 1 shows the differences of employment levels between GWII veterans, all veterans, and non-veterans.

The unemployment rates of GWII veterans compared to the other two categories is concerning. Their unemployment rates have been at least two percentage points higher than the other categories when looking at the highest rate for each. The largest difference was in January of 2011, when GWII veterans had unemployment rates 5.3 percentage points higher than all veterans and 5.6 percentage points higher than all non-veterans. Current unemployment rates demonstrate that GWII veterans surpass those of all veterans and all non-veterans by at least one percentage point. Though these rates have fallen since January 2011, there is still a need for improvement. The following section will evaluate the history of federal veteran employment policies and examine some of the current initiatives that target Post 9/11 veterans.

Switzer/Employment Policies for Post9/11 Veterans

Unemployment Rates – September 2008 – March 2015						
Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor and Statistics. (2015, April 8).						
	All Veterans		Non-Veterans		Gulf War II Veterans	
Highest	Mar '10	9.8%	Mar '10	10.0%	Mar '10	14.7%
Lowest	Oct '14	4.5%	Oct '14	5.4%	Oct '14	7.2%
March '15	4.9%		5.5%		6.5%	
	Gulf War II Veterans		All Veterans		Non-Veterans	
Highest	Jan '11	15.2%	Jan '11	9.9%	Jan '11	9.6%
Lowest	May '14	5.4%	May '14	5.0%	May '14	5.9%
March '15	6.5%		4.9%		5.5%	
	Non-Veterans		Gulf War II Veterans		All Veterans	
Highest	Jan '10	10.4%	Jan '10	12.6%	Jan '10	9.6%
Lowest	Dec '14	5.4%	Dec '14	6.9%	Dec '14	4.7%
March '15	5.5%		6.5%		4.9%	

Federal Veteran Employment Policies

Federal employment policies for veterans date back to 1865 with the Senate and the House of Representatives passing a resolution urging disabled veterans to receive preferences for civil offices. In 1876, Congress added a provision to the 1865 law that added retention preference. This ensured that if honorably discharged veterans were at risk of losing their employment due to reorganization or downsizing, they would be given the preference to retain their employment.

In 1912, Congress created an absolute retention policy for honorably discharged veterans with good performance ratings. This allowed veterans to be considered for job retention above non-veteran federal employees, even if those non-veterans had seniority and higher performance

ratings. The Selective Training and Service Act of 1940 added a stipulation that those called to military service would be able to come back to that same employment position once they completed their military service. This act is similar to the Uniformed Services and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) of 1994 that provides those same protections to National Guard and Reserve personnel that are called to active duty.

Federal employment policies for veterans were further developed with the passage of the Veterans Preference Act of 1944. Representative Thomas D'Alesandro, at a committee hearing in support of this bill, said:

This nation has trained 12 million fighting men to destroy and kill. They have been taken away from schools, colleges, and jobs. Their home life has been broken up and they have turned into tough soldiers and sailors. The millions of men and women returning from the war fronts and camps will need jobs, money, training, hospitalization, and other assistance. They expect stability and security, so that they can start rebuilding their private lives. We must give them all that. It is the least we can do for them. (Stimson, 2004, p. 262)

The aforementioned historic legislation established veteran preference for hiring into federal positions. Qualifying veterans were allowed to bypass height and age requirements and at times, educational requirements for employment, with the exception of certain scientific, technical and professional positions. The law established a 10-point employment preference for disabled veterans and a 5-point employment preference for all other wartime veterans. Veterans were also the first to receive protections from being fired, demoted, or a reduction in pay without good cause and they were able to appeal their employer's decision to the Civil Service Commission. "Non-veterans did not acquire them until President Kennedy's Executive Order 10987 in 1962" (Stimson, 2004, p. 263). Federal veteran preference points are still in existence today.

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, most commonly known as the first GI Bill, also assisted with the

employment for WWII veterans. This law, signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on June 22, 1944, provided education and training benefits; loan guarantees for homes, farms and businesses; and unemployment pay for discharged veterans. The education benefits provided by the GI Bill were incredibly successful and utilized by many veterans. “In the peak year of 1947, Veterans accounted for 49 percent of college admissions. By the time the original GI Bill ended on July 25, 1956, 7.8 million of 16 million World War II Veterans had participated in an education or training program” (USDVA, November 8, 2013). The success of these federal employment and education programs for WWII veterans has been credited for the subsequent growth in the nation’s economy as the country recovered from a devastating war.

Currently, there are several employment related initiatives throughout the country. One such program is the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), which operated through a partnership between the Department of Labor (DoL), the Department of Defense (DoD), and the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA). The mission of the program is “to provide comprehensive service to our nation’s Servicemembers to transition to work, life, and home after the military” (USDVA, November 8, 2013). A core component of TAP is a three-day workshop conducted at military installations throughout the country and includes resume assistance, sessions on job search, current market conditions, and other employment related informational tools. Servicemembers that are disabled are able to attend the Disabled Transition Program (DTAP), which provides additional training focused on the needs of disabled servicemembers. Both programs also provide extensive briefings on benefits offered by the Department of Veterans Affairs. All service members that are exiting the military are required to participate in the three-day TAP seminar, with the option of taking other offered sessions at their installations.

Another employment related initiative is the Helmets to Hardhats and the Troops to Teachers programs, which are both funded by the Department of Defense. These programs assist veterans with obtaining the training and

certifications to find employment in the construction and education industry. In Fiscal Year 2010, the Helmet to Hardhats program had a budget of \$3 million and the Troops to Teachers program had a \$14 million budget (Scott, 2011). According to their website, Helmets to Hardhats has placed nearly 6,000 military veterans into construction industry positions since 2007 (Helmet to Hardhats, 2015). The Troops to Teachers program has helped over 17,000 participants gain employment in public schools nationally (Troops to Teachers, 2015).

The Yellow Ribbon program is another initiative that receives DoD funding. This program is similar to TAP in its goals and objectives, but focuses more on servicemembers who have been discharged for 30, 60, or 90 days. “The DoD’s Yellow Ribbon program offers seminars where veterans can obtain information on issues such as employment, money management, and health education” (Humensky et. al., 2012, p. 159). The unique benefit of this program is that it helps veterans after their initial transitional period. Currently, the program is tailored to National Guard and Reserve soldiers who have returned home after a deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan.

On November 21, 2011, President Barack Obama signed legislation called the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011, with the mission to end veteran unemployment. This legislation has many provisions. Firstly, it mandated that servicemembers participate in TAP and expanded the types of sessions the program provides. Secondly, it expanded education and training for unemployed veterans through additional GI Bill and Vocational Rehabilitation eligibility. Thirdly, it allowed servicemembers to obtain federal veteran preferences before their discharge date. Lastly, it created two different veterans tax credits for all veterans and disabled veterans. “The Returning Heroes Tax Credit provides businesses that hire unemployed veterans with a credit of up to \$5,600 per veteran, and the Wounded Warriors Tax Credit offers a credit of \$9,600 per veteran for businesses that hire veterans with service-connected disabilities” (Marshall Jr., 2011). The tax credits initially expired at the close of 2013 but were extended to the close of 2014.

Federal education programs have also given Post 9/11 veterans a boost in the labor market. On June 30, 2008, Congress passed the Post 9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008, which went into effect August 1, 2009. This is commonly referred to as the Post 9/11 GI Bill. This three-year educational program offers 100% tuition assistance, as well as a living and book stipend for veterans who have served more than 36 months of active duty service after September 10, 2001. "Over one million veterans received Veterans Affairs Educational Benefits in 2013 through the Post 9/11 GI Bill and with the increasing volume of service members separating from the military, the number of educational beneficiaries is expected to reach two million before 2020" (Tinoco, 2015, p. 28).

Veteran Challenges to Employment

Despite the many federal employment policies for veterans, Post 9/11 veterans are still facing employment challenges once they transition out of the military. One primary challenge is the lack of transferrable skills. When an individual joins the military, recruiters communicate to them that their military experience will set them up for success in the civilian world upon their discharge. While some veterans gain transferrable skills, such as military intelligence, mechanics, etc., many do not acquire these attributes. One employer stated:

In the military there's areas of highest unemployment like 11Bravo, which is infantry. Those don't match at all with the job openings we have...We have the IT-related jobs here, and there are a lot of IT in the military, but that's still a small piece of the pie, and the IT people leaving the military, for this group unemployment is low, whereas you look at combat arms, that is where the unemployment is. (Hall et. al., 2014, p. 15)

Secondary to the missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, combat military operation specialties (MOS) make up a large percentage of the servicemembers that are attempting to enter the labor force. While their accomplishments are not

to be diminished, the tangible military skills they have gained are not highly demanded in the civilian world.

A related employment challenge that many veterans face is the ability to communicate their military experience to potential employers. While in the military, promotions and positions are obtained through physical training scores, shooting records, completion of advanced courses, and performance reviews. Contrary to the civilian work, veterans do not have to create a resume that accents their military accomplishments and accolades in order to gain position while serving.

Monster Worldwide, the company that founded the employment Web sites Monster.com and Military.com, conducted a survey in the fall of 2014 that shed light on what troops experience as they try to find work in today's job market. Two-thirds of veterans who responded to the survey said their top challenge is communicating their military skills in ways that employers can understand and utilize. (Hicks, 2014)

Veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan also face the negative stigma of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which can create a significant employment barrier. "Employers may hold negative stereotypes about recent military veterans, their experiences, and their estimated 'employability' based on political ideology, stereotypes of poor skills, or presumptions of mental or emotional dysfunction, as happened with Vietnam veterans" (Kleykamp, 2009, p. 268).

Advances in technology have significantly lowered the mortality rate of those injured in multiple combat deployment, however mental stability of veterans remains a concern. Emotional and mental issues have been evident with veterans of each conflict the US military has participated in. PTSD was better known as 'sad soldier's heart' in the Civil War, 'shell shock' in WWI and WWII, 'combat stress' through the Vietnam and Korean Wars, and has gained national attention as PTSD with veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. It has been estimated that nearly 20% of Active Duty soldiers have served three or more combat tours in support of the Global War on Terror

(Mulrine, 2012). Extensive exposure to combat, long separation periods, and other factors can be seen as the causes for the emotional and mental issues that many veterans may face upon their discharge.

Veterans have also been trained to be proud, self-reliant and independent. Consequently, they may be hesitant to ask for help or assistance when they are discharged and faced with employment challenges. “The most difficult task for any veteran to overcome may be learning that it is all right to need help and even more important to seek help when needed” (Vacchi, 2012, p. 18). They often transition from a tight-knit community of like-minded individuals to a somewhat unknown world, with little to no guidance on how to maintain that sense of community. “Some veterans have difficulty adjusting to an environment with less day-to-day urgency, fewer responsibilities, and less authority than they experienced during their military service” (Hall et. al., 2014, pp. 21-22).

The Post 9/11 GI Bill has provided incredible educational and financial benefits that assist veterans with obtaining higher education to increase their employability. Though they may be utilizing these benefits en masse, student veterans also face struggles in the university settings.

Multiple studies note that the injuries sustained by Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) veterans are more survivable than previous wars due to the improvements in body armor and medical care. Though physically survivable, however, disabilities connected to traumatic brain injuries (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), major depression, and related complications of alcohol abuse and troubled family relationships, among other challenges, often test a student veteran’s ability to successfully complete a college education. (Tinoco, 2015, p. 30)

Some veterans may be first generation students without the family support to navigate the educational experience. Others may be unsure what career path they should pursue once they enter the educational setting. Veterans may also face financial challenges when their VA educational benefits

are delayed or may be unsure what benefits they are eligible for and how to apply for those benefits.

Veteran Employment Successes

Since their peak of 15.2% in January of 2011, unemployment rates for Post 9/11 veterans have steadily fallen to 6.5% as of March of 2015. The reason for this drop may be due in part to the growth of the economy in the United States. As the country has slowly begun to recover from the Great Recession, national unemployment rates have improved overall. Federal veteran preferences have also contributed to the employment improvement for veterans. The Bureau of Labor and Statistics (March 18, 2015) reported that nearly 25% of Gulf War II veterans currently work in the public sector, more than double the 14% of non-veterans. Nearly 1 in 3 veterans with a service-connected disability work in the public sector, due in part to the 10-point preference that they receive. In 2014 almost half of all new federal hires were veterans (Chiarenza, 2015, p. 5).

The private sector has also taken a stand to combat high unemployment rates of veterans. In March of 2011, JPMorgan & Chase, along with 10 other national companies, established the 100,000 Jobs Mission. The goal of this initiative was to hire 100,000 veterans by the end of 2020. By the third quarter of 2014, the initiative surpassed their goal with the confirmed employment of over 190,000 veterans and has increased their goal to 200,000 veterans hired by 2020. The movement currently has 179 private sector companies signed on to the initiative.

The 100,000 Jobs Mission coalition, in partnership with the RAND Corporation, produced a report that evaluated the success of the initiative and identified the lessons that have been learned so far, as well as created recommendations for both public policy and private sector organizations on how to improve the employment situation for veterans. Through a survey submitted to participating organizations; the report found that veterans in the workplace bring the following valuable skills: experience working in and leading teams; flexibility and ability to work in fast-paced, changing environments without stress;

dependability, work ethic, integrity, loyalty, and commitment to getting the job done; and experience working in a culturally diverse or global environment (Hall et. al., 2014, pp.. 7-8).

One key aspect of the 100,000 Jobs Mission is their use of the Veteran Talent Exchange. This is a web-based tool that is available to participating organizations. If a recruiter does not feel a veteran is a good fit for their company, they can refer the veteran to the Exchange and can help the veteran find employment in another company. One member said, “One thing interesting for me is that recruiting is a very competitive function...it is very, very competitive. Yet in this space, we collaborate and share” (Hall et. al., 2014, p. 27). Through this initiative, the private sector has taken incredible steps to assist transitioning veterans with finding great employment opportunities in the civilian world. “The first five minutes of a mission, you’re executing on strategy. Then, you’re adapting and improvising. So they (veterans) can be very creative, incredible problem solvers and that’s an interesting aspect to bring to a company that might need sort of a boost of enthusiasm and innovation” (Peralta, 2014).

Recommendations

Based on the evaluation of the research of federal veteran employment policies and private sector initiatives, several recommendations can be made that would assist Post 9/11 veterans in gaining further employment opportunities in the civilian world. First, the DoD should undertake additional improvements to the Transition Assistance Program for active duty servicemembers that are close to separation or have recently separated. “In interviews, veterans suggested that TAP resources around employment and benefits might be more useful to them if they were offered after veterans had been home for a few months and had time to rest and recuperate; TAP sessions typically take place immediately after service when newly separated veterans are more focused on getting home and unsure of what they will be doing next” (Chiarenza, 2015, p. 5). Improvements should also be made in mandating more TAP

sessions for servicemembers prior to their discharge and at an earlier stage. In the final month before discharge, servicemembers are more concerned with returning home than they are with the mandatory briefings and sessions they must attend before being released.

The federal government has already made strides in connecting the DoD and the VA, but considerable work is still needed, especially with regard to medical and mental healthcare provision for veterans. Currently, the medical and mental services for servicemembers operate on different systems than that of the VA. With a more intimate connection between the two federal agencies, a veteran's transfer and access to medical and mental healthcare services post-discharge will be smoother and veterans will be able to connect with their new benefits easier.

A final recommendation for assistance in veteran employment would be for both the federal and state governments to invest more resources in developing networks of local veteran organizations providing veteran services. This would help to establish a sense of community for veterans when they enter their new civilian life after military service. These steps would take a more holistic and comprehensive approach to the many struggles that veterans face upon discharge, with employment being the greatest challenge.

The State of Nevada has accomplished great things through their Green Zone Initiative, spearheaded by the Nevada Department of Veterans Services and Governor Brian Sandoval in 2012. With 226,000 veterans in the state, Nevada ranks 31st in veteran population for the country. When the Green Zone Initiative first started in 2012, it was focused around three pillars: Policy Development, Service Provider Coordination, and Connecting to Veterans. Through the Green Zone Initiative, the state has identified over 200 local veteran organizations that provide services specifically for veterans. With the use of the initiative's website as a starting point (www.greenzonenetwork.org), Nevada veterans can connect with local veteran agencies and learn what services are available for them in the areas of employment, education, financial, and community connectivity. "Local systems impact veterans in every

aspect of their lives, and aligning those systems, making them more efficient, and ensuring that the ‘Sea of Goodwill’ is built upon to improve veteran outcomes is challenging but critical to the long term outcomes we seek to achieve for this important population” (Gustafson & Cage, 2015, p. 15).

The State of Michigan has followed the lead of Nevada and created the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency (MVAA) in 2013, under the leadership of Governor Rick Snyder.

“The Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency (MVAA) serves as the central coordinating point, connecting those who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces and their families to services and benefits throughout the state. MVAA is responsible for administration and operation of the Michigan Veterans Trust Fund, Michigan Veterans Homeowners Assistance Program, Michigan’s two veterans’ homes, constituent service or referral and the state’s grant to chartered veterans’ service organizations and the Michigan Association of County Veterans Counselors” (MVAA, 2015).

In 2012, the State of Michigan discovered that they ranked 53rd, behind Puerto Rico, Guam, and Washington, D.C., in the amount of federal VA dollars that were coming into the state, despite Michigan having the 11th highest veteran population in the nation, with over 680,000 veterans. Due to this astounding lack of resources allocated to Michigan veterans, the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency was founded. Since that time, the state has risen to the rank of 47th, according to the 2013 Geographic Distribution of VA Expenditures (GDX) report (DVA, May 13, 2014). The MVAA is based on the following four pillars: Employment, Education, Healthcare, and Quality of Life. Through the creation of Veterans Community Action Teams (VCATS), the state has established regional networks for veterans to connect to the four pillars of services, with VCAT 10 (Detroit) and VCAT 4 (West Michigan) being the first in 2013.

The employment outlook for veterans that have deployed to support military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan since the attacks on the World Trade Center in

2001 has improved, but there are still gaps to be filled and progress to be made. Veterans contribute many valuable skills to the workplace that greatly benefit employers. Many employers appreciate the maturity and world experience that veterans bring with them and value them as members of the team. In the future, Post 9/11 Veterans, like their World War II predecessors, will continue to shape the future of this great country. “Today’s veterans enjoy the general support and approval of the American public. Therefore, it seems reasonable that all corners of American society would do what they can to help veterans succeed after these Americans answer the call to serve the nation during a time of war” (Vacchi, 2012, p. 21).

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