

3. THE VETERAN POPULATION

Approximately 25.2 million veterans of the U.S. uniformed services were living in the United States and Puerto Rico at the end of 2000. Although veterans comprise a richly diverse group, most veterans are White, non-Hispanic, married males. Overall the average age of a veteran is 58 years old, with the largest group of veterans between the ages of 45 and 64. Most veterans are currently employed, have a combined family income of more than \$50,000, and have completed high school.

The NSV 2001 surveyed individuals who served their full obligation of active duty in the military, or received early discharge for a medical condition, reduction in force, hardship, or at the convenience of the military. Active duty military service members and dishonorably discharged veterans were excluded from the survey.

This chapter summarizes demographic information about veterans. In addition, it describes historical changes in the veteran population. Characteristics detailed in this chapter include gender, age, race, ethnicity, marital status, education, and employment status. Because men and women veterans differ substantially on some of these demographic characteristics, comparisons are made by gender.

3.1 Gender

Female veteran demographic characteristics are quite different from those of their male counterparts. For example, female veterans tend to be younger, have a higher education level, and include a greater percentage of minorities. One plausible explanation for these gender differences is the increased number of women in armed forces since the cessation of the draft. Although, the majority of veterans are male, almost 6 percent of veterans are female. That is increase of 2 percent from the 1992 figures where females made up 4 percent of the veteran population. Given these gender differences, descriptions of veteran demographic characteristics in the remaining sections include gender comparisons.

3.2 Age

Respondents were asked to give their birthdate. Age was then calculated from this information. The average age of all veterans was 58 years. More specifically, 21.1 percent of the veteran population was under the age of 45, 41.2 percent were between the ages of 45 and 64, and 37.1 percent of the population was 65 years or older. These findings reflect the continuing trend of the aging veteran population. In comparison to the 1992 veteran population, the percentages of veterans in the youngest age cohort decreased (21 percent vs. 32 percent), the age percentage of the oldest age cohort increased (38 percent vs. 26 percent), and the middle cohort remained virtually unchanged (42 percent vs. 41 percent).

Gender comparisons shown in Table 3-1 indicate that almost 4 in 5 male veterans are 45 years and older. This percentage of male veterans over 45 reflects their participation in the major wars of the last century. In contrast, female veterans tend to be younger. More than half of female veterans are under the age of 45. This gender difference between male and female veterans is due in part because females did not enter into the armed forces in great numbers until 1975. However, there is also a smaller peak in the female veteran age distribution at the older ages, reflecting their participation in WWII. Approximately 12 percent of female veterans are 75 years or older.

Table 3-1. Percent distribution of veterans by age and gender

	Total	Males	Females
Less than 25 years	1.1	0.8	4.7
25-29 years	2.7	2.4	7.9
30-34 years	5.3	4.9	12.6
35-39 years	5.3	4.8	13.6
40-44 years	6.7	6.1	16.4
45-49 years	8.1	7.8	13.6
50-54 years	13.4	13.8	6.5
55-59 years	11.1	11.5	3.8
60-64 years	8.6	8.9	2.8
65-69 years	10.1	10.6	2.4
70-74 years	10.7	11.2	3.4
75-79 years	9.5	9.7	6.4
80 years or older	6.8	6.9	5.5
Unknown	0.6	0.6	0.4*
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of veterans†	25,196,000	23,712,400	1,483,600

* Low precision and/or sample size for the denominator between 30 and 59.

† Estimates of number of veterans are rounded to the nearest hundred.

3.3 Race and Ethnicity

The majority of veterans surveyed reported only one racial group with the highest proportion classifying themselves as White (84.8 percent). About 9 percent identified themselves as Black, while American Indian,¹ Asian, and Native Hawaiian² each comprise less than one percent. Of the 2.2 percent veterans who reported two or more races, the largest percentage classified themselves as American Indian or Alaska Native/White (Biracial American Indian-White).

Similar to results found in the 1992 National Survey of Veterans, Whites and Blacks accounted for 93.6 percent of today's veteran population. Overall, the number of minorities serving in the Armed Forces is increasing, leading to a more socially and ethnically diverse military. This trend is reflected in the veteran population as well. This increase in the minority veteran population may have significant ramifications, especially in terms of health care needs, programs, and possible benefits.

Similar to the gender differences in veterans' ages, men and women veterans also differ in race and ethnicity. About 9 percent of male veterans classified themselves in a minority racial group (any racial group other than White), in contrast to 17.1 percent of female veterans. This differential was primarily between male and female veterans who classified themselves as Black (8.4 percent vs. 15.7 percent, respectively). About equal proportions of male and female veterans were self-identified as Hispanic (4.5 percent and 4.1 percent, respectively).

In order to determine race and ethnicity, respondents first were asked whether they were Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino. Next, they were read a list of racial categories and asked to select one or more to describe their race. These categories, and the percent of veterans selecting them, are displayed in Table 3-2.

¹ This includes American Indian and Alaskan native.

² This includes native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander.

Table 3-2. Percent distribution of veterans by race, ethnicity, and gender

	Total	Males	Females
Race			
Total One Race	94.7	94.8	93.2
White	84.8	85.4	76.1
Black or African American	8.8	8.4	15.7
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.6	0.6	0.9
Asian	0.3	0.3	0.3
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.2	0.1	0.2
Total Two or More Races	2.2	2.2	3.0
American Indian or Alaska Native/White	1.4	1.4	2.0
Race Unknown	3.1	3.0	3.8
Total Race	100.0	100.0	100.0
Ethnicity			
Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino	4.5	4.5	4.1
Not Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino	95.2	95.2	95.4
Unknown	0.3	0.3	0.5
Total Ethnicity	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of veterans†	25,196,000	23,712,400	1,483,600

† Estimates of number of veterans are rounded to the nearest hundred; only one sub-category under “Total Two or More Races” is shown because all other categories were too small to report.

3.4 Marital Status

Respondents were asked their marital status. As Table 3-3 indicates, the majority of veterans are currently married (74.9 percent). In fact, more than 90 percent of the veteran population have been married at some point in their lives. Slightly more than one in ten are divorced (11.4 percent), while less than one in ten (7.2 percent) reported that they have never been married.

Table 3-3. Percent distribution of veterans by marital status and gender

	Total	Males	Females
Married, living with spouse	73.3	74.5	54.9
Married, not living with spouse	1.6	1.5	3.2
Widowed	5.3	5.1	8.0
Divorced	11.4	10.9	18.5
Legally separated	1.0	1.0	1.1*
Never been married	7.2	6.8	13.8
Unknown	0.2	0.2	0.5*
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of veterans†	25,196,000	23,712,400	1,483,600

* Low precision and/or sample size for the denominator between 30 and 59.

† Estimates of number of veterans are rounded to the nearest hundred.

Similar to other demographic patterns described in this chapter, marital status patterns differ between male and female veterans. Although both male and female veterans are most likely to be married, female veterans are twice as likely as their male counterparts to be either divorced or never married. Moreover, female veterans in comparison to male veterans are less likely to be currently married (54.9 percent vs. 74.5 percent, respectively).

The proportion of married veterans decreased slightly from that in 1992. At that time, 62 percent of the female veterans and 78 percent of the male veterans were married.

3.5 Level of Education

Respondents were asked the highest grade or year of school they had ever completed. Almost 60 percent of veterans have more than a high school diploma (58.8 percent). About 11 percent have not received a high school diploma; this percentage has decreased since 1992, when 17.1 percent of veterans had not completed high school.

The level of education achieved differs for male and female veterans. A higher percentage of female veterans have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to their male counterparts (28.2 percent vs. 22.7 percent, respectively).

Table 3-4. Percent distribution of veterans by education and gender

	Total	Males	Females
Less than high school graduate	11.1	11.7	1.7*
High school graduate or GED	29.9	30.5	20.5
Post high school schooling/training	35.8	34.9	49.4
Bachelor's degree or higher	23.0	22.7	28.2
Unknown	0.2	0.2	0.2*
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of veterans†	25,196,000	23,712,400	1,483,600

* Low precision and/or sample size for the denominator between 30 and 59.

† Estimates of number of veterans are rounded to the nearest hundred.

3.6 Employment Status

Respondents were asked whether they had worked or were looking for work the week prior to the survey. If not, they were asked why. From the responses to these questions, veterans were classified into employment categories displayed in Table 3-5. More than 50 percent (54.9 percent) of the 2000 veteran population was employed. Almost one-third (32.0 percent) of veterans were retired, 3.6 percent were not working but were looking for a job, and 6.9 percent were disabled. These proportions are similar to those found in the 1992 survey.

Due to their relative youth, a higher percentage of female veterans were currently employed (60.0 percent) compared to their male counterparts (54.6 percent). Moreover, a lower percentage of female veterans were retired compared to male veterans. In fact, twice as many male veterans were retired, compared to female veterans (33.0 percent vs. 16.9 percent, respectively).

Table 3-5. Percent distribution of veterans by employment status and gender

	Total	Males	Females
Working, or on vacation or sick leave from work	54.9	54.6	60.0
Not working, but looking for work	3.6	3.5	5.1
Retired	32.0	33.0	16.9
Disabled	6.9	7.0	5.8
Stopped looking for work because could not find work	0.2	0.2	0.4*
Temporarily laid off from work	0.2	0.2	0.3*
Taking care of home and family	0.8	0.4	7.5
Going to school	0.4	0.3	1.7
Other	0.7	0.6	1.8
Unknown	0.3	0.2	0.5*
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of veterans†	25,196,000	23,712,400	1,483,600

* Low precision and/or sample size for the denominator between 30 and 59.

† Estimates of number of veterans are rounded to the nearest hundred.

3.7 Family Income

Respondents were asked to report their total family income, before taxes and deductions, for tax year 2000. More than one-third (34.7 percent) of the 2000 veteran population had a combined family income of more than \$50,000. A slightly higher proportion of female veterans reported family income over \$50,000, compared to male veterans (37.3 percent vs. 34.6 percent, respectively). Although smaller, this gender difference was also found in the proportion reporting a family income of \$10,000 or less (6.3 percent of female veterans, 5.2 percent of male veterans).

Table 3-6. Percent distribution of veterans by family income and gender

	Total	Males	Females
\$10,000 or less	5.3	5.2	6.3
\$10,001 to \$20,000	12.1	12.1	12.1
\$20,001 to \$30,000	13.9	14.0	12.7
\$30,001 to \$40,000	12.5	12.5	12.9
\$40,001 to \$50,000	10.8	10.7	11.9
Over \$50,000	34.7	34.6	37.3
Unknown	10.7	10.9	6.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of veterans†	25,196,000	23,712,400	1,483,600

† Estimates of number of veterans are rounded to the nearest hundred.

3.8 Historical Perspective and Trends

The number of female veterans is increasing, although the size of the female veteran population lags far behind that of the male veteran population. On the 1992 survey, females made up 4 percent of the veteran population whereas on the 2001 NSV, females made up 6 percent of the veteran population. In addition to the increase in the number of female veterans, the number of minority veterans has also increased.

The percentage of veterans who report being married on the 2001 NSV (74.9 percent) decreased slightly from the percentage of veterans who reported being married in the 1992 population (77.3 percent). Inversely, the percentage of veterans on the 2001 NSV who report being divorced or legally separated (12.4 percent) increased slightly over veterans in the 1992 survey (10.6 percent). The other marital status categories remained virtually unchanged.

Overall, the educational levels of veterans have continually increased since 1986³. For both 1992 and 2001 surveys, at least 50 percent of all veterans reported having some advanced schooling or training (i.e., greater than high school graduate or GED). The percentage of veterans who received some advanced schooling or training on the 2001 NSV (58.7 percent) was higher than the 1992 survey (53.0 percent). Paralleling this trend, the percentage of veterans who reported having less than a high school degree on the 2001 survey (11.1 percent) was lower than the comparable group of veterans in the 1992 survey (17.0 percent).

³ *National Survey of Veterans (NSV9503)*, Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for Veteran Analysis and Statistics, April 1995