

Characteristics of Veterans in Allied Health Care Occupations

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BACKGROUND

There are approximately 20 million military veterans in the United States, among which 4.6 million are from the post-9/11 period of service. Healthcare is the third most common industry in which male veterans work, and healthcare occupations are among the fastest growing opportunities for male veterans. Healthcare may continue to be a good industry in which veterans find job opportunities especially as healthcare expands and demands an additional three to four million workers after the passage of the Affordable Care Act.

A younger generation of veterans has faced difficulties entering the labor force, as its high unemployment rate confirms. In 2015, the unemployment rate among veterans age 18 to 24 years old was two to three times higher at 13.0% compared to other age groups, which ranged from 3.4% to 6.9%. It also exceeded the 10.9% unemployment rate among non-veterans age 18 to 24 years old. Given that many of the growing occupations in healthcare require less than a Bachelor's degree, healthcare may provide good entry-level opportunities for veterans, especially those young veterans facing high unemployment, as they transition into the civilian sector. The goal of this study was to explore how veterans in healthcare occupations compare to their civilian counterparts. Understanding how these groups compare will help policymakers target programs to assist veterans in finding employment in healthcare.

METHODS

For this study, we used the 2011-2013 American Community Survey (ACS), which is a household survey conducted annually by the U.S. Census Bureau. We restricted our analysis to the non-institutionalized population age 18 to 75 years old living in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. We used pre-defined stratified sample probability weights to make the sample nationally representative and identified individuals working in healthcare occupations as classified by four-digit Census occupation codes. Sociodemographic characteristics of the study population were compared by veteran status and gender, and unpaired two sample t-tests were conducted to determine significant differences across mean characteristics by gender and by veteran status. Pearson's chi-squared test was used to determine significant differences in proportions across veteran status within gender. Statistical significance was determined at $p < 0.001$ unless otherwise noted.

KEY FINDINGS

HEALTHCARE OCCUPATIONS OF VETERANS

- Healthcare from 2011 to 2013 was a female-dominated field among non-veterans, (79.7% female) but among veterans, the gender distribution was nearly reversed (32.0% female).
- Generally, veterans had a lower percentage of females in every occupation compared to non-veterans.
- Among veterans, female veterans working in a healthcare occupation were significantly likely to be younger, not married, working part-time, below the poverty level, and receiving lower average individual earnings than male veterans.
- Allied health professions such as diagnostic related technologist/technician (e.g., cardiovascular technologist/technician, sonographer, magnetic resonance imaging technologist) were among those most commonly held occupations by veterans across both genders, but with higher frequency among males.
- Female veterans and non-veterans were more likely to be in lower-skilled occupations like nursing/psychiatric/home health aide, medical assistant, and personal/home care aide compared to their male counterparts.
- About 40% of veterans under age of 25, either gender, were in low-skilled aide and assistant positions; this was significantly higher than among young non-veterans.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Given that healthcare occupations are in high demand for the foreseeable future and veterans are currently underrepresented in the field, young veterans struggling to find employment should be encouraged to consider opportunities in healthcare.

Reflective of the larger veteran population, veterans working in healthcare were largely an older male population that is relatively well-educated and working in highly skilled occupations. Young veterans, on the other hand, were more likely to be in assistive entry-level occupations regardless of gender.

The nation's challenge is to ensure that veterans and non-veterans who enter healthcare occupations enter at the highest level their education and training supports, and that they have trajectories that encourage career advancement and upward mobility. More work is needed to understand the underlying factors (e.g., military training and experience, financial support for education from the GI bill) that led male veterans to more highly skilled and higher-paying occupations in healthcare.

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Figure 1: Top healthcare occupations held by female veterans compared with non-veterans, 2011-2013¹

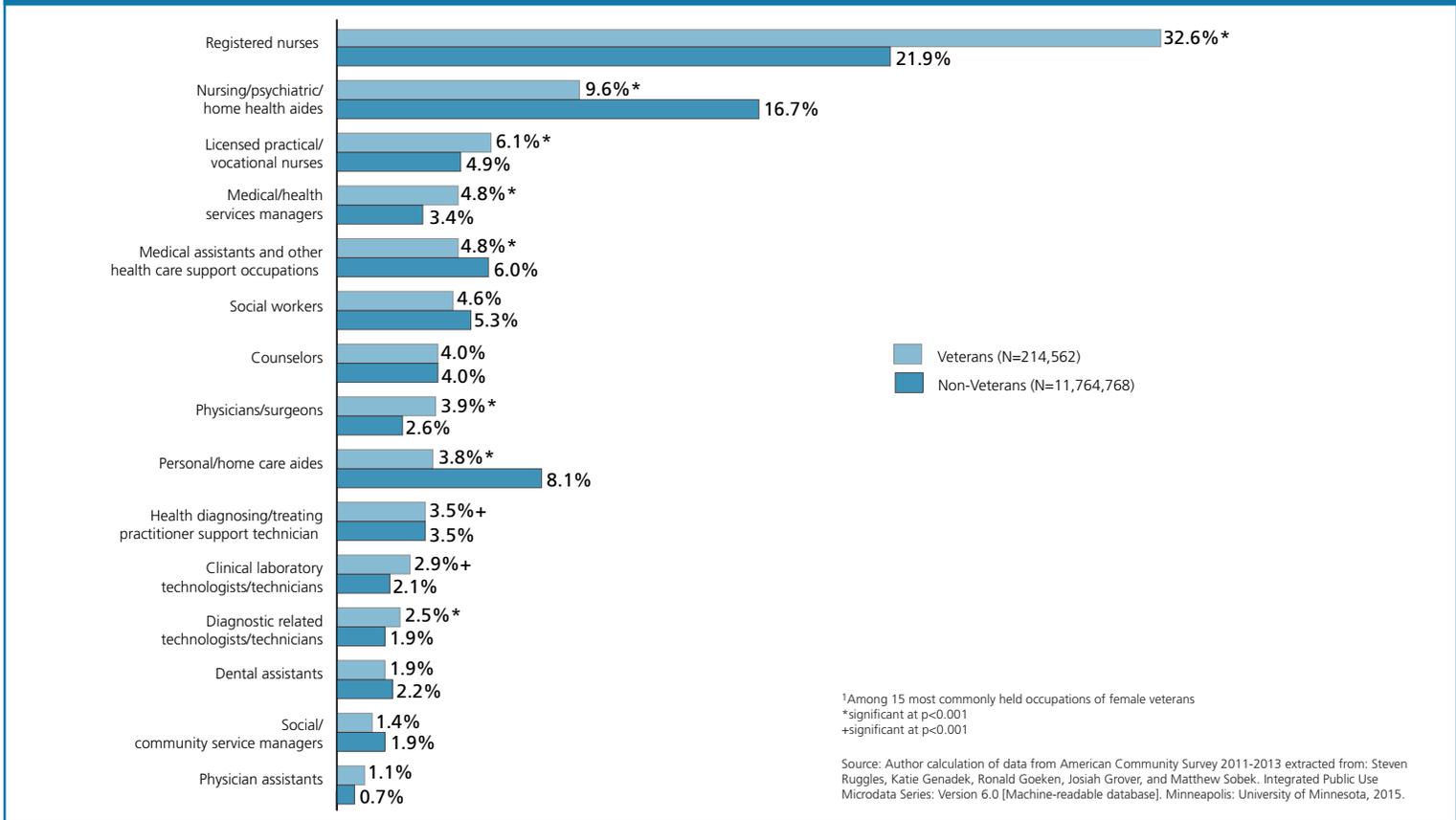
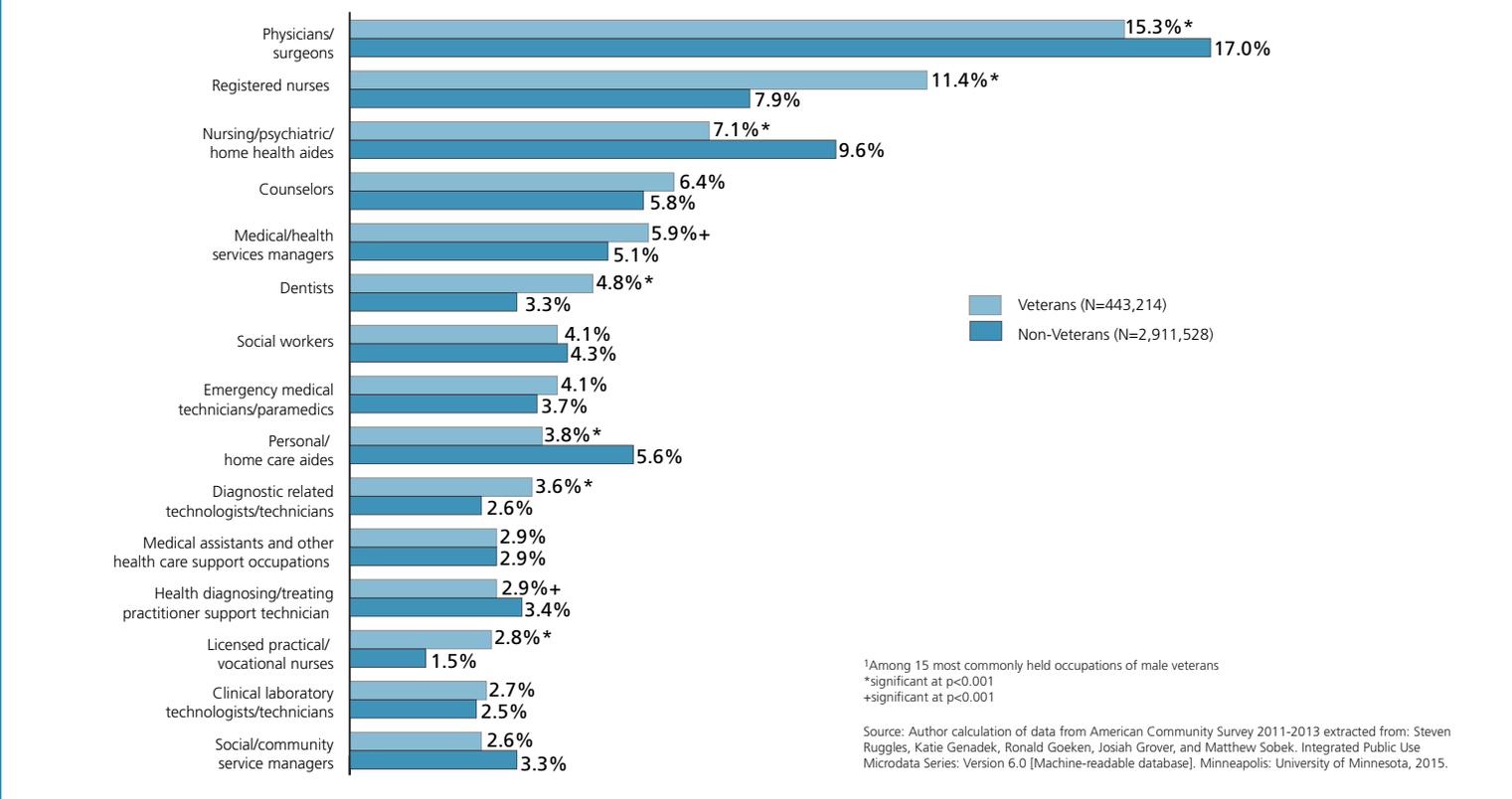


Figure 2: Top healthcare occupations held by male veterans compared with non-veterans, 2011-2013¹



More information about characteristics of veterans holding allied health occupations and occupations most commonly held by veterans is available in the report: Frogner BK, Skillman SM, Snyder CR. Characteristics of Veterans in Allied Health Care Occupations. Center for Health Workforce Studies, University of Washington, Nov 2016. This work was funded through HRSA Cooperative Agreement U81HP27844 Health Workforce Research Centers Program.