

Differences in the Perception of Educational Benefits between Male and Female Veterans in the United States: A National Study

Cassandra D. Boyd, John R. Slate, and Wally Barnes
 Sam Houston State University
 profsplate@aol.com**

Abstract: *Following their military service, veterans in the United States are eligible to take advantage of federally guaranteed educational benefits. These benefits would certainly enhance the academic skills and potential employability of veterans. As such, information is needed regarding their perceptions of educational benefits and the degree to which differences might be present as a function of gender. In this study, archival data from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (V.A.), National Survey of Veterans, Active Duty Service Members, Demobilized National Guard, and Reserve Members, Family Members, and Surviving Spouses were analyzed to determine whether male and female veterans differed with respect to the level of importance they assigned to educational benefits. A statistically significant difference was yielded between male and female veterans related to the importance they assigned to their educational benefits. Female veterans who were surveyed regarded educational benefits as being more important to meeting their educational goals or obtaining better employment, when compared to male veterans. One important recommendation for practitioners is that academic advisors, career counselors, and college administrators should consider these results when offering guidance to male veterans who may view educational benefits as less important in comparison to female veterans.*

Keywords: Veteran; G.I. Bill; Student Veterans; educational benefits; gender; military; post-911; college readiness

Introduction

According to the Department of Veteran Affairs (2016), 1,091,044 million student veterans received educational benefits toward their educational enrollment in postsecondary institutions in the United States. This number of veterans will increase as more student veterans register for classes each year due to the culmination of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the downsizing of military personnel, and the monetary assistance from the 2008 Post-911 Veteran's Assistance Act and the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Assistance Act, called the Forever G.I. Bill (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018). Both the 2008 Post-911 Veteran's Assistance Act and the Forever G.I. Bill is similar to Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944,

commonly known as the G.I. Bill originally designed for WWII veterans, which provided an incentive for those who served from 1939-1945 to enroll in college courses (Santos, Esqueda and Molina, 2015).

Therefore, with the enactment of the 2008 Post-911 Veteran's Assistance Act and the more recent Forever G.I. Bill, male and female veterans are more motivated to use their educational benefits to increase their employment prospects by pursuing college (Irwin, 2016). Sadly, many college administrators and college advisors do not fully understand the unique barriers of student veterans who are entering higher education in mass with exposure to combat, previous traumatic life experiences, which may be coupled with individuals lack of college-readiness although they can receive educational benefits for credit-bearing college courses (Parks, Walker and Smith, 2015; Semer and Harmening, 2015). Thus, research is required to understand the extent to which differences might be present within this student veteran population between male and female veterans and how these differences might affect perceptions of their educational benefits.

Definition of Terms

Veteran. "A person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable" (Veterans' Benefits, 38 U.S.C. x 101(2002).

Student veteran. A veteran who is "experiencing a number of challenges, including adapting to a new environment, a new role, and incorporating the identity of a student into the identity of a veteran" (Naphan and Elliot, 2015, p. 37).

Post-911 Veteran's Assistance Act. This bill, enacted in 2008, is similar to the former Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the G.I. Bill that was enacted to provide educational benefits to over two million veterans from 1944 to 1956 (Santos, Esqueda and Molina, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

According to Bryan, Bryan, Hinkson, Bichrest and Ahern (2014) and Parks et al. (2015), student veterans have a higher dropout rates in college compared to other students possibly due to their nuanced barriers while becoming a college student, including post-traumatic stress, physical injuries, and nonacademic financial concerns (e.g. child care and lack of prior college experiences). Gaddy et al. (2018) argued that the US Army supports American interests across the globe with exceptional difficulties, which places them with burden, stress and trauma both physically and psychologically. Pellegrino and Hoggan (2015) conducted a qualitative study with two female veterans attending public community colleges. Using Schlossberg's transition theory and data from a larger previous study, they focused on female veterans with cognitive and non-cognitive college readiness difficulties surrounding their transition to college. Of special note, both female veterans were married and mothers who

faced adversities regarding childcare. In addition to child-care concerns and academic preparedness, participants also cited family stress caused by military deployments and financial strain from delayed VA educational benefits (Pellegrino and Hoggan, 2015).

Programs and services such as support groups could be designed for female veterans attending 2-year colleges to meet the budding demands for gender specific support services (Pellegrino and Hoggan, 2015). Similarly, researchers (Diramio, Jarvis, Iverson, Seher and Anderson, 2015; Pellegrino and Hoggan, 2015) have suggested that colleges counselors seek scholarships or grants for drop-in daycare programs and promote work-study employment for female veterans. School officials at postsecondary institutions might also investigate best practices for intrusive counseling by gender, in particular financial and academic counseling to assist male and female student veterans in managing educational benefits and college degree plans that might influence them differently before avoiding to drop out.

Mankowski et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study within the larger Women Veterans Cohort Study concerning the reasons female veterans who served during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) first joined the military. Data were collected from 18 female active duty service members and veterans (Mankowski et al., 2015). One important finding was that a majority of the participants shared an interest in gaining job skills, career development, and access to educational benefits to pay for college as key factors for enlisting in the military. Other findings included themes on various personal opportunities, a calling to serve, and life outcomes.

A surprising finding reported by Mankowski (2015) was that over 50% of the female participants choose to make the military their lifelong career. Mankowski (2015) recommended that more research studies were warranted on the motivation, retention, and the reintegration needs of women post-military, particularly with military recruitment efforts targeting 20% women for service by the year 2020. If the trend continues, a record-breaking number of female veterans could transition into civilian life by using GI bill benefits and enroll in colleges within a couple of years, leaving many college administrators unprepared for an unprecedented veteran gender shift.

According to Diramio et al. (2015), 15% of female veterans constitute the veteran population and a growing number of female veterans are beginning to maximize their VA educational benefits. With an increase in the numbers of female veterans, Diramio et al. (2015) surmised that female veterans attending college might bring negative male-dominated thought processes (e.g., thinking that they are the lesser sex) to college campuses. One surprising finding was that many female veterans resolved that they might not be worthy enough to accept more VA benefits (Diramio et al., 2015). That is, many female college-going veterans believed that their time served in the military deserved only educational benefits (Diramio et al., 2015).

Results within the Veteran Affairs administration also confirmed data that the use of veteran benefits overall was low for female veterans (Washington et al., 2011). Female veteran

benefit use is now historically lower in contrast to the record number of women who are increasing serving and served the military (Washington et al., 2011). To this point, Baechtold and Sawal (2009) stated that unlearning self-discriminating gender coping norms embedded in military culture might ease adjustment to civilian life for female veterans in college.

College counselors must anticipate an increased amount of student veterans utilizing their educational benefits, but that both male and female veterans might not seek help, but possibly relying on additional support services on campus to successfully transition as a civilian (Diramio et al., 2015). Although, Diramio et al. (2015) provided insights on the rationale that female veterans might perceive and use their educational benefits differently than male veterans; additional literature on veteran perceptions and educational benefits use by gender could influence how policy and legislation support colleges with resources to help veterans transition to campus life.

Significance of the Study

Student veterans arrive on campuses with different barriers and unique sets of life challenges and after exiting the military. These unique barriers, such as post-traumatic stress syndrome, physical injuries, suicidal thoughts, and financial strain are compounded with other issues similar to students who are non-traditional. For example, non-traditional students are often defined as being older than 25 years of age, having family responsibilities, and full-time jobs (Diramio et al., 2015; Hammond, 2016; Irwin; 2016; Parks et al., 2015; Pellegrino and Hoggan, 2015). Again, veterans have similar challenges in comparison to non-traditional students, but differ because of their access to educational benefits from the federal government that can pay 100% of their college education if they choose to pursue a degree at a public institution (Ford and Vignare, 2015).

Despite the additional educational benefits for veterans, financial support from the military does not correlate to student success for all veterans. Thus, male and female veteran perceptions might differ regarding the importance placed on the education benefits offered as a means to accomplishing life goals. For instance, researchers (Heitzman and Somers, 2015; Mankowski, 2015; Pellegrino and Hoggan, 2015; Segal and Lane, 2016;) reported that additional factors (e.g., motivation, child care needs, transportation, job security) might affect how student veterans use their educational benefits and transition into civilian life, especially for post-9/11 female student veterans. Research on the relationship between gender, student veterans, and educational benefits is limited. According to Mankowski et al. (2015) such research is more important than ever, especially as Hispanic and Black women are currently increasing in numbers and are overrepresented in the armed forces (Kelty, Kleykamp and Segal, 2010). In essence, the aforementioned researchers (Kelty et al., 2010; Mankowski et al., 2015) suggested that female veterans might be prone to use their educational benefits ways that differ from how male veterans might use their educational benefits.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was twofold. The first purpose was to investigate whether male and female veterans in the United States differed in their perceived importance of educational benefits. A second purpose was to add to the existing research literature regarding the presence of gender differences of veterans using educational benefits and their perceptions of the importance of educational benefits pertaining to college goals and the employment. Thus, male and female veteran perceptions on educational benefits were examined.

Research Question

The following research question was addressed in this study:

What is the difference in the perceived importance of educational benefits between male and female veterans?

Method

Research Design

The researchers for this study used a casual comparative ex post facto design. No variables can be manipulated in causal comparative ex post facto research (Creswell, 2009; Johnson and Christensen, 2012). Johnson and Christensen (2012) described archival data as data that represents events that previously occurred. Thus, archival data were investigated for analysis in the 2010 National Survey of Veterans (NSV), Active Duty Service Members, the Demobilized National Guard, Reserve Members, Family Members, and Surviving Spouses survey.

Participants, Implementation, and Procedures

Data received from National Survey of Veterans (NSV), Active Duty Service Members, the Demobilized National Guard, Reserve Members, Family Members, and Surviving Spouses were downloaded into a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS-PC Version 22) data file for statistical analyses for year, 2010. In particular, information was gathered from the Department of Veterans Affairs website which included data on 2,848 veterans, active duty service members, and/or family members. Accordingly, respondents were 16 years of age and older living in the United States and who were no inmates at a correctional facility were considered for participation in the survey (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2010). In sum, results from the NSV quantitative database will continue to be available for generations of upcoming scholars to conduct future research studies (Johnson and Christensen, 2012).

Results

To ascertain whether differences were present between male and female veterans in their perceptions regarding the importance (i.e., Extremely Important, Very Important, Moderately Important, Slightly Important, Not At All Important) of educational benefits, a Pearson Chi-square analysis was conducted. Slate and Rojas-LeBouef (2011) noted that a chi-square analysis is the statistical procedure of choice when variables are categorical (e.g., gender, race, and ethnicity). This statistical procedure was viewed as the optimal statistical procedure to use because frequency data were present for male and female veterans as well as for their responses to a survey item on the importance of educational benefits. In addition, with the large sample size, the available sample size per cell was more than five. Therefore, the assumptions for using chi-square analyses were met.

For this research question, in which the focus was placed on the importance of educational benefits to meet educational life goals or to secure a job between male and female veterans, the result was statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 40.33$, $p < .001$. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was small, .12 (Cohen, 1988). As revealed in Table 1, 65.9% of female veterans who were surveyed indicated that educational benefits were extremely important to meeting their educational goals, or obtaining better employment, compared to 42.8% of male veterans who placed the same importance on education and better employment. Another percentage difference between male and female veterans was their responses to the Not At All Important survey item. Almost twice as many males (i.e., 7.40%) perceived educational benefits as having no importance when compared to female veterans (i.e., 4.30%). Readers are referred to Table 1 for in-depth comparison of descriptive statistics related to the perception of educational benefits between male and female veterans.

Table 1: Frequencies and Percentages of the Importance of Educational Benefits for Male and Female Veterans

Importance	Male n and %age	Female n and %age
Extremely Important	(n = 1,140) 42.80%	(n = 122) 65.90%
Very Important	(n = 714) 26.80%	(n = 37) 20.00%
Moderately Important	(n = 404) 15.20%	(n = 10) 5.4%
Slightly Important	(n = 207) 7.80%	(n = 8) 4.30%
Not At All Important	(n = 198) 7.40%	(n = 8) 4.30%

As revealed in Table 1, almost two thirds of female veterans believed that educational benefits would be extremely important to them in meeting their educational goals, or obtaining better employment. This two thirds, combined with the 20% for being Very Important, may be interpreted to mean that a large majority, over 85% of female veterans believed in the importance of education benefits for them. In contrast, only about two thirds of male veterans indicated that they believed educational benefits would be important to meeting their educational goals. Over 15% of male veterans responded that they did not perceive educational benefits to be relevant to their education goals.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to distinguish whether male and female veterans in the United States differed in their perception of the importance of educational benefits. The percentage of female veterans who indicated that educational benefits were extremely important was higher, at 65.90%, than the percentage of male veterans, 42.80%. These percentages are comparable to Mankowski et al. (2015) who revealed that female veterans have a higher likelihood than male veterans of using their educational benefits.

Similarly, Segal and Lane (2016) revealed that educational benefits from the G.I Bill had positive outcomes for female veterans. Segal and Lane (2016) stated that educational benefits used before and after female soldiers left the military generally produced on-going well-being factors (e.g., monetary resources, individual resiliency, and peer support). Thus, educational benefits might promote mental and financial well-being for female veterans throughout their civilian lifespan (Segal and Lane, 2016).

According to Mankowski et al. (2015), the focus on gender and veteran educational benefits might be of note to scholars as a future trend, because by 2020, many female veterans will have enlisted during the Post 9/11 wars (Evans et al., 2015). Furthermore, female veterans who served after September 11, 2001 will have a higher motivation to use their increased post 9/11 educational benefits (Segal and Lane, 2016). Interestingly, one of the findings of this research study was in agreement with Routon (2014) who reported that female veterans were more likely to obtain a college degree compared to male veterans who also faced similar academic and societal barriers such as, less college-readiness, being unemployed, and financial stress. Provided in the present study is information that could help college administrators understand the unique transitional barriers of the increasing student veteran population and offers insights for academic advisors and counselors to understand difference contexts and levels of educational benefit importance for male veterans compared to female veterans when providing academic advising and financial counseling.

Conclusion

In conclusion, clear and strong differences were present between our sample of United States male and female veterans in their views regarding the importance of educational benefits. Female veterans were clearly more supportive in their beliefs that educational benefits would be of value to them in their pursuit of their educational goals. Male veterans did not possess the same sort of positive perceptions.

Implications

This study needs to be followed up with additional investigations. The focus of this study was solely on gender differences. What is not known but would be important to address would be the degree to which ethnic/racial differences might be present in perceptions

regarding the importance of educational benefits. That is, do Black, Hispanic, and White veterans have the same perceptions on educational benefits use or do differences exist? This information could be of enormous value to postsecondary institutions and to counselors there in dealing with veterans at their universities.

References

- Baechtold, M. (2011). Women warriors: Supporting female student veterans. *ASHE Higher Education Report*, 37(3), 69-80. doi:10.1002/aehe.3703
- Baechtold, M., & De Sawal, D. M. (2009). Meeting the needs of women veterans. *New Directions for Student Services*, 2009(126), 35-43.
- Blaauw-Hara, M. (2016). "The military taught me how to study, how to work hard": Helping student-veterans transition by building on their strengths. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 40(10), 1-15.
- Brown, C., & Routon, P. W. (2016). Military service and the civilian labor force. *Armed Forces & Society*, 42(3), 562-584. doi:10.1177/0095327X15625499
- Bryan, C. J., Bryan, A. O., Hinkson, Jr., K., Bichrest, M., & Ahern, D. A. (2014). Depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, and grade point average among student service members and veterans. *Journal of Rehabilitation Research & Development*, 51(7), 1035-1045. doi:10.1682/JRRD.2014.01.0012
- Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Diramio, D., Jarvis, K., Iverson, S., Seher, C., & Anderson, R. (2015). Out of the shadows: Female student veterans and help seeking. *College Student Journal*, 49(1), 49-68.
- Elbogen, E. B., Johnson, S. C., Wagner, H. R., Newton, V. M., & Beckham, J. C. (2012). Financial well-being and postdeployment adjustment among Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans. *Military Medicine*, 177(6), 669-675.
- Evans, J. J., Pellegrino, L., & Hoggan, C. (2015). Supporting veterans at the community college: A review of the literature. *Community College Enterprise*, 21(1), 47-65.
- Ford, K., & Vignare, K. (2015). The evolving military learner population: A review of the literature. *Online Learning*, 19(1), 1-24.
- Fortney, J. C., Curran, G. M., Hunt, J. B., Cheney, A. M., Lu, L., Valenstein, M., & Eisenberg, D. (2016). Prevalence of probable mental disorders and help-seeking behaviors among veteran and non-veteran community college students. *General Hospital Psychiatry*, 38(1), 99-104. doi:10.1016/j.genhosppsych.2015.09.007
- Foster, L. K., & Vince, S. (2009). *California's women veterans: Challenges and needs of those who served*. Sacramento, CA: California Research Bureau.
- Gaddy, J. W., Gonzalez, S. P., Mirabella, J., Lathan, C. A., & Scott, H. I. (2018). The influence of time perspective on retention in United States Army Personnel. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Sciences*, 2(2), 70-83.
- Gonzalez, M. D., Henriquez, B., & McKennon, M. (2014). Veterans breaking employment Barriers. *Franklin Business & Law Journal*, 2014 (4), 75-98.

- Hammond, S. P. (2016). Complex perceptions of identity: The experiences of student combat veterans in community college. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 40(2), 146-159. doi:10.1080/10668926.2015.1017891
- Heineman, J. A. (2016). Supporting veterans: Creating a “military friendly” community college campus. *Community College Journal of Research & Practice*, 40(3), 219-227. doi:10.1080/10668926.2015.1112318
- Heitzman, A. C., & Somers, P. (2015). (2015). The disappeared ones: Female student veterans at a four-year college. *College & University*, 90(4), 16-26.
- Henning, G. W., & Roberts, D. (2016). *Student affairs assessment: Theory to practice*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Irwin, J. P. (2016). Academic libraries, veterans, and for-profit higher education. *Progressive Librarian*, 44, 28-39.
- Johnson, B., & Christensen, L. (2012). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kelty, R., Kleykamp, M., & Segal, D. R. (2010). The military and the transition to adulthood. *The Future of Children*, 181-207.
- Ottley, A. H. (2014). Empty promise: Black American veterans and the new GI Bill. *New Directions for Adult & Continuing Education*, (144), 79-88.
- Mankowski, M., Tower, L. E., Brandt, C. A., & Mattocks, K. (2015). Why women join the military: Enlistment decisions and postdeployment experiences of service members and veterans. *Social Work*, 60(4), 315-323.
- Miles, R. A. (2014). Career and life transitions of veterans enrolled in community colleges and programs developed to meet their needs. *Career Planning & Adult Development Journal*, 30(3), 172.
- Naphan, D. E., & Elliott, M. (2015). Role exit from the military: Student veterans' perceptions of transitioning from the US military to higher education. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(2), 36-48.
- Parks, R., Walker, E., & Smith, C. (2015). Exploring the challenges of academic advising for student veterans. *College & University*, 90(4), 37-52.
- Pellegrino, L., & Hoggan, C. (2015). A tale of two transitions: Female military veterans during their first year at community college. *Adult Learning*, 26(3), 124-131. doi:10.1177/1045159515583257
- Pusser, B., Breneman, D. W., Ganseder, B. M., Kohl, K. J., Levin, J. S., Milam, J. H., & Turner, S. E. (2007). *Returning to learning: Adults' success in college is key to America's future*. Indianapolis, IN: Lumina Foundation for Education.
- Routon, P. (2014). The effect of 21st century military service on civilian labor and educational outcomes. *Journal of Labor Research*, 35(1), 15-38. doi:10.1007/s12122-013-9170-4
- Santos, J. L., Esqueda, M. C., & Molina, D. (2015). Military service and college: An exploratory examination of military-connected Latina/o undergraduates and access to higher education. *Journal of Latino-Latin American Studies*, 7(2), 102-118.
- Segal, M. W., & Lane, M. D. (2016). Conceptual model of military women's life events and well-being. *Military Medicine*, 181(1 Suppl.), 12-19. doi:10.7205/MILMED-D-15-00345

- Slate, J. R., & Rojas-LeBouef, A. (2011). *Calculating basic statistical procedures in SPSS: A self-help and practical guide to preparing theses, dissertations, and manuscripts*. Ypsilanti, MI: NCPEA Press.
- Stern, L. (2017). Post 9/11 veterans with service-connected disabilities and their transition to the civilian workforce: A review of the literature. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 19(1), 66-77. doi:10.1177/1523422316682928
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2010). National Survey of Veterans (NSV). Retrieved from <https://catalog.data.gov/dataset/national-survey-of-veterans-active-duty-service-members-demobilized-national-guard-and-res>
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2016). Education program beneficiaries: FY2000 to FY2013. Retrieved from <http://www.va.gov/vetdata/utilization.asp>
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2018). Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act-Forever G.I. Bill. Retrieved from <https://www.benefits.va.gov/GIBILL/docs/factsheets/ForeverGIBillFactSheet.pdf>
- Veterans' Benefits, 38 U.S. Code § 101 (2002).
- Vick, B., & Fontanella, G. (2017). Gender, race & the veteran wage gap. *Social Science Research*, 61, 11-28. doi:10.1016/j.ssresearch.2016.07.005
- Washington, D. L., Bean-Mayberry, B., Riopelle, D., & Yano, E. M. (2011). Access to care for women veterans: Delayed healthcare and unmet needs. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 26(Suppl. 2), 655-661. doi:10.1007/s11606-011-1772-z
- Weisser, C. (2015, November 17). The veteran guide to financial success. *Money*, 44(10), 82-91.

**Paper Received November 2, 2018; Re submission November 21,
Accepted January 25, 2019; Published May 2, 2019**