

## Finding 8 Veteran Employment

Despite mostly positive employment outcomes, Veterans of color face unique challenges when compared to their white, non-Hispanic Veteran counterparts.

As discussed in Finding 3, obtaining employment is an important facet of a Veteran's post-service transition experience. While Veterans face challenges with securing civilian employment, on average, Veterans are succeeding<sup>1</sup> when looking at some employment outcomes. However, racially and ethnically diverse Veterans experience higher unemployment rates and lower median earnings, compared to white, non-Hispanic, non-Veterans.<sup>2</sup> This suggests that existing employment initiatives should work to ensure racially/ethnically diverse Veterans are connected with high-quality civilian job opportunities to reduce economic disparities.



\*Unless otherwise noted, respondents indicated having at least one racial/ethnic identity other than white.  
The appearance of U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) visual information does not imply or constitute DoD endorsement.

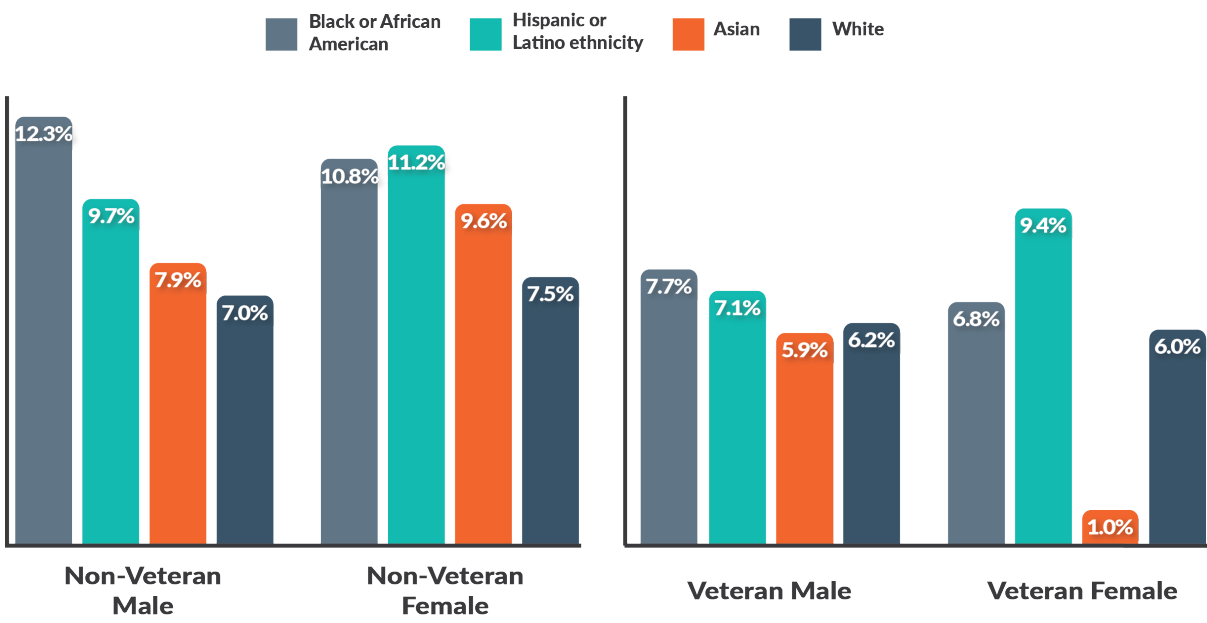
**Military service contributes to better employment outcomes for Veterans, compared to their civilian counterparts. However, female and racial/ethnic minority Veterans generally do not experience the same benefits as the white, non-Hispanic men they served beside.**

Four in 10 (41%)<sup>3</sup> Veteran respondents\* indicate they are better able to find a job, compared to their non-white family/friends who are not connected to the military—a sentiment that is supported by national unemployment and earnings data. Veterans of all races/ethnicities (and both males and females) experience lower unemployment rates than their civilian peers<sup>4</sup> (Figure 1). While racial/ethnic minority Veterans are experiencing lower unemployment rates than their non-Veteran peers, they are falling behind their white, non-Hispanic Veteran counterparts. Racial/ethnic differences in unemployment among Veterans are most stark among female Veterans where Hispanic or Latina Veterans have an unemployment rate 3.4 percentage points higher than their white female Veteran peers.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, Veterans fare better than their civilian counterparts in terms of median earnings, regardless of race/ethnicity and/or gender. However, racial/ethnic and gender disparities emerge when compared to their white, non-Hispanic Veteran peers (Figure 2). Of note, Asian Veterans and non-Veterans experience better employment outcomes than any other group, regardless of gender. In general, they have the highest median earnings and lowest unemployment rate, among both males and females, and when compared to all other analyzed racial/ethnic groups. Still, more in-depth research is needed, especially within the various racial/ethnic groups in the wake of COVID-19.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 1: Unemployment Rates by Race/Ethnicity and Veteran Status**

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020 Annual Averages<sup>26</sup>

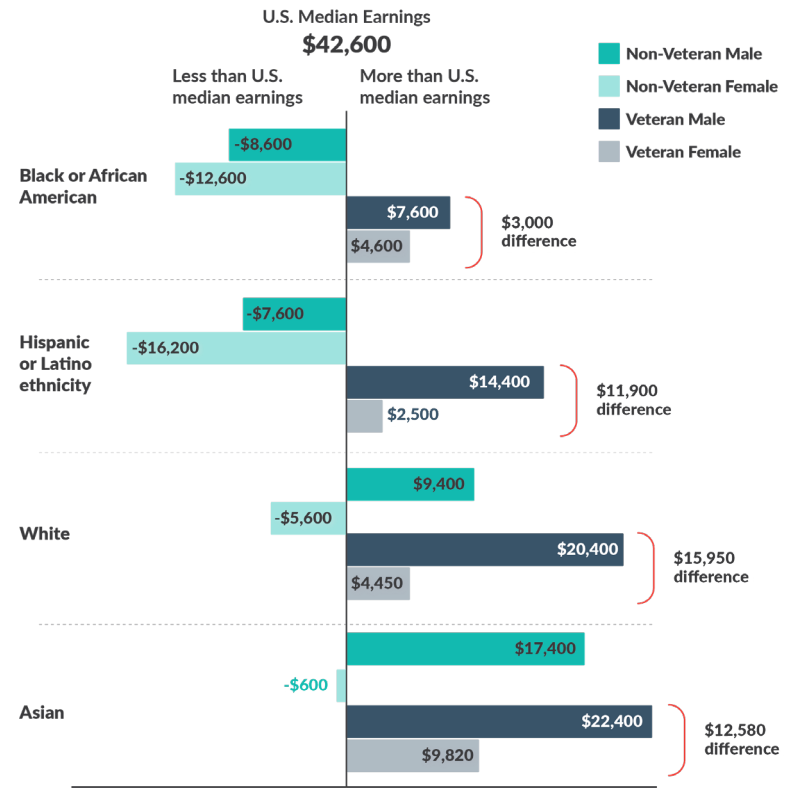


Note: Descriptions of race/ethnicity mirror the original data source

\*Unless otherwise noted, respondents indicated having at least one racial/ethnic identity other than white.

**Figure 2: Deviation from Median Earnings by Race/Ethnicity and Veteran Status**

Median Earnings U.S. Population, 18 and older and in the labor force: \$42,600<sup>26</sup>  
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 earnings using 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates



Note: Descriptions of race/ethnicity mirror the original data source

**COVID-19 introduced uncertainty regarding the degree to which positive employment trends for Veterans will hold in the long term.**

The true impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Veteran employment in general, and with regard to race/ethnicity and gender, remains to be seen. On the one hand, labor market conditions at the onset of the pandemic were projected to disproportionately impact industries and metropolitan areas in which Veterans were highly represented, subjecting them to a high risk of job loss.<sup>7</sup> Although Veteran unemployment rates have improved, they have not returned to pre-COVID-19 levels. When asked about various COVID-19 impact areas, “employment situation” has the greatest proportion of Veteran respondents (23%) who selected “somewhat worse” or “much worse” than their friends and family (of the same racial/ethnic background without military connections).<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, roughly one-third (35%) of Veteran respondents\* indicate their employment situation is “much better” or “somewhat better” than their non-military friends and family of the same racial/ethnic background. (Additional COVID-19 impact areas are explored in Findings 5, 6, 7, and 9.)

\*Unless otherwise noted, respondents indicated having at least one racial/ethnic identity other than white.

Increased availability of online university/higher education courses (and the GI Bill modifications needed to enable them<sup>9</sup>) may have made pursuing further education more appealing and accessible, especially for Veterans with PTSD, anxiety, or other service-connected disabilities that can make it challenging for some Veterans to be on campus.<sup>10</sup> Nearly half (46%)<sup>11</sup> of Veteran respondents\* report their ability to pursue educational opportunities is “much better” or “somewhat” better than that of their non-white friends and family who are not military-connected.

## **Like their active-duty service member counterparts, Veteran respondents of color report their race/ethnicity impacts them in the workplace.**

Veterans may also face stigma in the workplace, which can result from a lack of military cultural competence and stereotypes regarding Veterans’ health, among other things.<sup>12</sup> It is difficult to tease apart hiring and/or workplace discrimination stemming from Veteran status and/or racial/ethnic discrimination for Veterans of color, highlighting the importance of studying and understanding intersectionality once again. The results of this study indicate that many Veterans are subjected to racial/ethnic discrimination in the workplace: 44% of Veteran respondents\* indicate they believe their “racial/ethnic identity has hurt their ability to get ahead at work.”<sup>13</sup> Similar to active-duty service member respondents,\* more than half of Veteran respondents\* (65%) report experiencing unfair punitive counseling or investigation in the workplace.<sup>14</sup>



**The use of offensive language, telling racially offensive jokes, symbols (white power), and symbolism (gorilla stickers placed on my door at work) in my federal work environment. My life became a living hell after I filed a formal EEO [Equal Employment Opportunity] complaint. I finally left the workplace. The case is still pending. Leadership continues to lie about the incidents and my reporting of them.**

- Black Veteran and Veteran Spouse

\*Unless otherwise noted, respondents indicated having at least one racial/ethnic identity other than white.

## Veterans of color face challenges in finding employment that matches their skillset.

Veterans sometimes struggle to convey their skills gained during their military service for civilian employment opportunities, and potential employers may underestimate soft skills such as management and leadership that Veterans can bring to a new role.<sup>15</sup> One in four Veteran respondents\* (25%) perceive their ability to “work in their career field”<sup>16</sup> to be “much worse” or “somewhat worse,” compared to their non-white friends and family who are not military-connected; 30% report the same with regard to their ability to “advance within their career.”<sup>17</sup> These results may reflect the difficulty in translating military service experience into civilian employment.

Additional barriers to Veteran employment, such as physical or mental health concerns<sup>18</sup> and perceived stigma, are documented. Findings from this survey suggest their severity may vary by race/ethnicity.<sup>19</sup> Of those Veteran respondents\* to this survey who report they need employment and career development services since January 2020, 43%<sup>20</sup> did not get them. The top reasons for not using these programs and services are a lack of knowledge (“I did not know how to access this service” - 27%) and stigma (“I worried about what others [family, friends, coworkers/supervisor] would think of me if I used this service” - 16%).<sup>21</sup>

Frequent relocation during military service may make it difficult for Veterans to establish a strong professional network, which is key to connecting Veterans with desired employment opportunities.<sup>22</sup> Of Veteran respondents\* who indicate they want a mentor, 51% desire a mentor for employment, career exploration, professional development, and leadership development.<sup>23</sup> One in five Veteran respondents\* (21%) perceive their ability to cultivate a strong professional network as “somewhat worse” or “much worse” than that of their non-white friends and family who are not military-connected.<sup>24</sup>

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\*Unless otherwise noted, respondents indicated having at least one racial/ethnic identity other than white.



## Finding 8 Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Gumber & Vespa, 2020; Angrist, 1990; Maury, Stone, & Armstrong, 2018, December.
- <sup>2</sup> Kleycamp, 2013; Maury, Stone, & Armstrong, 2018, December.
- <sup>3</sup> 33% indicated their ability to find a job was the same, and 26% indicated their ability to find a job was somewhat worse or much worse, compared to non-white family/friends who are not connected to the military (n=219). Respondents who indicated "I don't know" were excluded from this analysis.
- <sup>4</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020.
- <sup>5</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>6</sup> Horsley, 2020; Pickert, 2021; Kam, 2021.
- <sup>7</sup> Ramchand, Harrell, Berglass, & Marshall Lauck, 2020.
- <sup>8</sup> 42% indicated that their employment situation was the same, and 23% indicated that their employment situation was somewhat worse or much worse, compared to family/friends (of the same race/ethnicity) who are not connected to the military (n=224). Respondents who indicated "I don't know" were excluded from this analysis.
- <sup>9</sup> Shane, 2021, December 15.
- <sup>10</sup> Zoli, Maury, & Fay, 2015, November.
- <sup>11</sup> 40% indicated that their ability to pursue educational opportunities was the same, and 14% indicated that their ability to pursue educational opportunities was somewhat worse or much worse, compared to non-white family/friends who are not connected to the military (n=222). Respondents who indicated "I don't know" were excluded from this analysis.
- <sup>12</sup> Shepherd, Sherman, MacLean, & Kay, 2021; Shepherd, Kay, & Gray, 2019; Stone, Legnick-Hall, & Muldoon, 2018; Stone & Stone, 2015.
- <sup>13</sup> n=308.
- <sup>14</sup> n=310.
- <sup>15</sup> Keeling, Kintzle, & Castro, 2018; Bradbard & Armstrong, 2016, February; Curry Hall, et al., 2014.
- <sup>16</sup> 38% indicated that their ability to work in their career field was the same, and 37% indicated that their ability to pursue educational opportunities was somewhat better or much better compared to non-white family/friends who are not connected to the military (n=215). Respondents who indicated "I don't know" were excluded from this analysis.
- <sup>17</sup> 35% indicated that their ability to advance within their career was the same, and 35% indicated that their ability to pursue educational opportunities was somewhat better or much better compared to non-white family/friends who are not connected to the military (n=217). Respondents who indicated "I don't know" were excluded from this analysis.
- <sup>18</sup> Studies have shown that Veterans with physical or mental health concerns stemming from military service have poorer employment outcomes, compared to Veterans who do not. Concerted efforts should therefore be made to ensure that Veterans are accessing health care and vocational resources through the VA (see Finding 11).
- <sup>19</sup> Bradbard, & Maury, 2021; Zoli, Maury, & Fay, 2015, November; Vogt, 2011.
- <sup>20</sup> n=134.
- <sup>21</sup> n=56.
- <sup>22</sup> Bradbard & Armstrong, 2016, February; Bradbard, Maury, & Armstrong, 2016, December; Curry Hall, et al., 2014.
- <sup>23</sup> n=178.
- <sup>24</sup> 41% indicated that their ability to cultivate a strong professional network was the same, and 38% indicated that their ability to pursue educational opportunities was somewhat better or much better, compared to non-white family/friends who are not connected to the military (n=223). Respondents who indicated "I don't know" were excluded from this analysis.
- <sup>25</sup> Unemployment for Veterans is data analyzed using BLS, 2020 Annual Average, Current Population Survey; population 18 and over. Race and ethnicity are two separate questions. Persons whose ethnicity is identified as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race. Data for American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander are too small to report.
- <sup>26</sup> Earnings for Veterans is data analyzed using Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Sophia Foster, Ronald Goeken, Jose Pacas, Megan Schouweiler and Matthew Sobek. IPUMS USA: Version 11.0 [U.S. Census Bureau 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates only reported 2019]. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V11.0>. Notes: The variables created for veteran and civilian earnings are from U.S. Census Bureau, 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates for 2019 only. A Veteran is identified as someone who has served on active duty but is not currently serving. Civilians are identified as neither being in the armed forces family/household as well as veteran family/household. The variable for income calculations is



"inctot," total personal income. In all calculations, (1) values of 9999999 were excluded, (2) all negative values were excluded, and (3) all values of zero (0) were excluded. Thus, values presented are all positive income values with no inflation adjustment. In addition, the calculations for all groups are of those in the labor force only and population 18 and over. Race and ethnicity are two separate questions. Persons who ethnicity is identified as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race. Data for American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander are too small to report.

## Finding 8 References

*Unless otherwise noted, images are sourced from Blue Star Families Stock Photos, DVIDSHub.net, Unsplash.com. The appearance of U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) visual information does not imply or constitute DoD endorsement.*

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