Military Experience and Marital History

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Research Questions

- Are people with military experience more likely than people without military experience to:
  a) have ever been married?
  b) have ever been divorced or separated?
  c) have ever been widowed?

Background

Benefits of Military Marriage

(Easterbrooks, 2013; Lester, 2013)

- ➤ Family is a support system
- ➤ Health care, pay benefits, job security
- ➤ Military provides a sense of belonging
- ➤ Resources are tailored to accommodate military families and their needs

Hypothesis 1. Veterans are more likely than non-veterans to have ever been married.

Stress of Military Marriage

(Lester 2013; MacDermid Wadsworth 2011; Padden 2011)

- ➤ Frequent relocations
- ➤ Long and unpredictable duty hours
- ➤ Risk of injury and death
- ➤ Separation from a spouse and family for extended amounts of time
- ➤ Marital strain from changing schedules and roles within a household
- ➤ Pre through post deployment cycle

Hypothesis 2. Veterans are more likely than non-veterans to have been divorced.
Hypothesis 3. Veterans are more likely than non-veterans to have been be widowed.

Significance

- To improve the lives of service members and their families, it is important to understand veterans' experiences with family life.
- Military spouses and families are the invisible force supporting military members.

Data and Sample

- General Social Survey (GSS) 2012 (N = 1,974)
- U.S. civilian adults 18-89 years of age.
- For this analysis, N = 1,965. Involves veterans only.

Dependent Measures

Marital History

- ➤ Married, never divorced, separated, or widowed   33.2%
- ➤ Ever widowed, never divorced or separated   7.2%
- ➤ Ever divorced or separated   32.8%
- ➤ Never married   26.7%

Independent Measure

Military experience

- ➤ Yes   11.5%
- ➤ No   88.5%
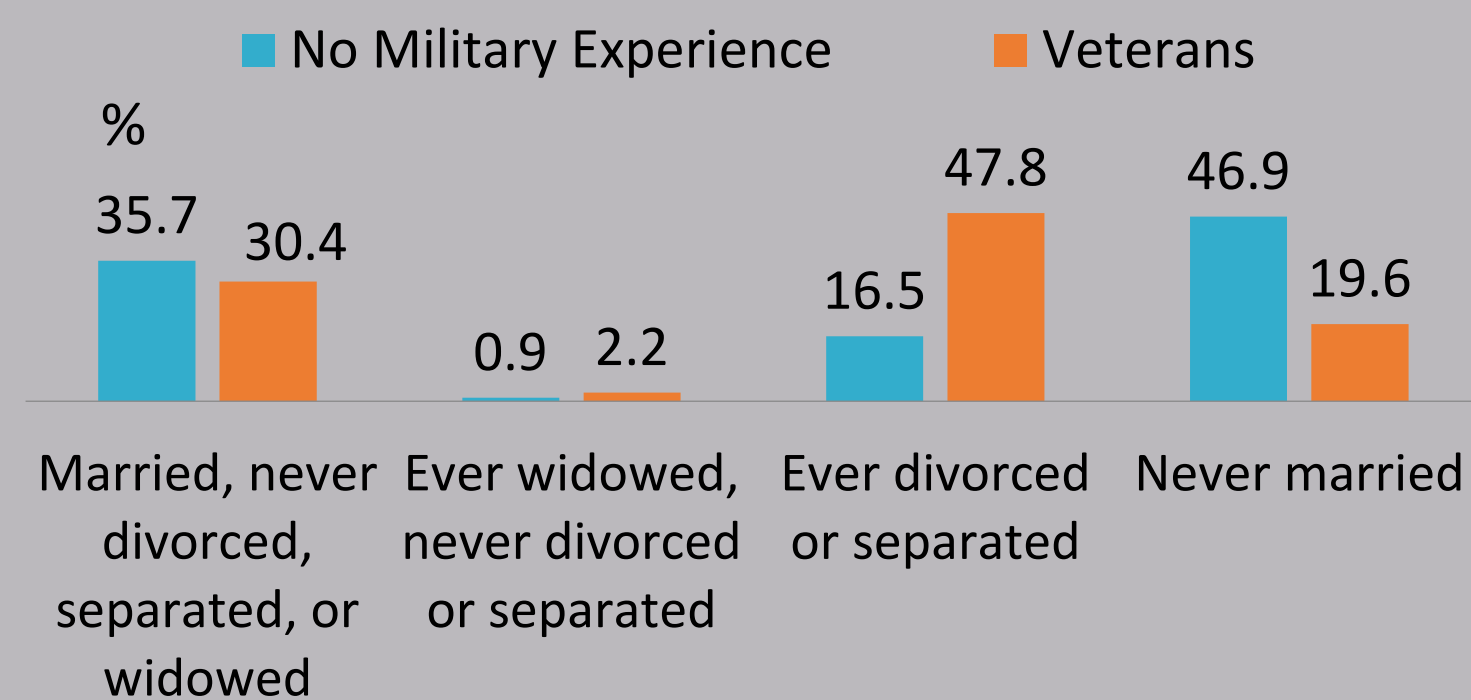
Control Measure

Age

- ➤ 18 to 44   45.3%
- ➤ 45 to 89   54.7%

Analysis

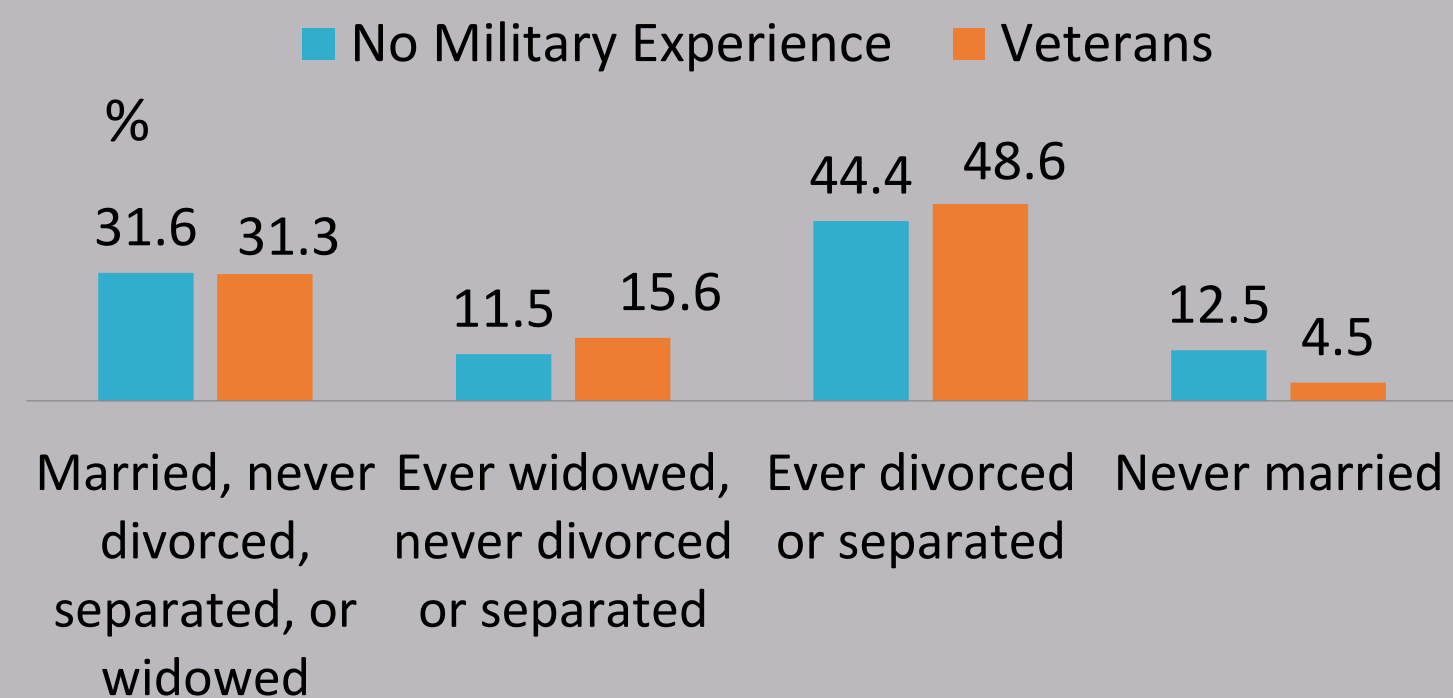- Cross tabulation and Chi-square test as well as t-tests, using SPSS

Results

Figure 1. Marital History by Veteran Status: U.S. Adults Aged 18 - 44

■ No Military Experience   ■ Veterans

%
- Married, never divorced, separated, or widowed: 35.7 / 30.4
- Ever widowed, never divorced or separated: 0.9 / 2.2
- Ever divorced or separated: 16.5 / 47.8
- Never married: 46.9 / 19.6

Notes. Chi-square test was significant at p < .001. T-tests show that differences in % married (never divorced or widowed) and ever widowed (never divorced) by military status are not significant.

Figure 2. Marital History by Veteran Status: U.S. Adults Aged 45 - 89

■ No Military Experience   ■ Veterans

%
- Married, never divorced, separated, or widowed: 31.6 / 31.3
- Ever widowed, never divorced or separated: 11.5 / 15.6
- Ever divorced or separated: 44.4 / 48.6
- Never married: 12.5 / 4.5

Notes. Chi-square test was significant at p < .05. T-tests show that differences in % married (never divorced or widowed), ever widowed (never divorced), and ever divorced by military status are not significant.

Summary of Results

- Compared to those without any military experience, veterans are:
  - ➤ Less likely to have "never been married" for both age groups.
  - ➤ More likely to have ever been divorced or separated for the 18 – 44 age group only.
  - ➤ No more likely to have been widowed for both age groups.

Policy Implications

- Veterans who leave at younger ages may need support that helps maintain marriage.

Limitations

- GSS did not include adults who are currently serving in the military. This especially affects the results for the younger age group.

References

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Padden, D., Connors, R., & Agazio, J. (2011). Stress, Coping, and Well-Being in Military Spouses During Deployment Separation. Western Journal of Nursing Research, 1-21.

- This project is based on my Sociology Capstone (SOC 4800) course paper.