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 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.

Independent Measure

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%

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No Military Experience</th>
<th>Veterans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married, never divorced, separated, or widowed</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever widowed, never divorced or separated</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever divorced or separated</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>46.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never married</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No Military Experience</th>
<th>Veterans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married, never divorced, separated, or widowed</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever widowed, never divorced or separated</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever divorced or separated</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>48.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never married</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

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

References