



# **NATIONAL COALITION *for* HOMELESS VETERANS**

## **Transitioning to the Civilian Workforce: Issues Impacting the Reentry of Rural Women Veterans**

© Celia Renteria Szelwach, Jill Steinkogler, Ellen R. Badger, and Ria Muttukumaru | [Full Report](#)

### Quick Takeaways

- Women veterans seeking employment in rural areas often face several challenges, such as geographical barriers, limited employment opportunities, and a lack of childcare resources within their respective communities.
- These women veterans may face additional challenges from a complex set of issues, including untreated physical and psychological disorders such as post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) resulting from combat, Military Sexual Trauma (MST), or other traumas associated with military service.
- Other struggles women veterans face include negative experiences during military service, self-perceptions that they are not veterans if they did not serve in combat, and lack of awareness by employers and the larger community that women are veterans and bring valuable leadership skills to the workplace.
- Recommendations to improve programs include redesigning jobs and expanding telecommuting opportunities, establish and track rural employment metrics, reevaluate and re-communicate the role and structure of the state DVA offices, and form veteran-centered partnerships and collaborations.

### Barriers and Unique Attributes

The report emphasizes a three-pronged approach to address women veterans' needs when returning to a rural environment.

1. Measure the effectiveness of current programs utilizing metrics specific to rural women veterans.
2. Revise programs to fit the needs of rural area.
3. Form new partnerships to engage and educate rural employers on the value that women veterans bring to the workplace.

Women veterans may face barriers to accessing specific programs and services due to those services being targeted toward homeless male veterans. The report offers four recommendations to address these barriers:

1. Establishment of a Women Veterans Employment Research Committee.
2. Adjust the Fifth National Survey of Veterans, analysis of current population survey data.
3. Conduct longitudinal study of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP).
4. Develop case studies that review the hiring practices of employers and unions.

The report provided several explanations for the different issues that confront rural, women veterans as opposed to veterans living in urban areas.

1. Local economies often rely on one specific industry.
2. The changing labor force environment and higher education requirements have combined to reduce employment options for rural workers.
3. Limited access to well-paying jobs with benefits, longer distances to employment, lack of public transportation options, scarce educational and social resources, and fewer options for child care.
4. Rural people are more likely to experience poorer health than their urban counterparts.
5. Overall, rural women face more difficulties moving out of low-wage, part-time jobs and are more disadvantaged than rural men with respect to finding adequate employment.

Higher levels of educational attainment have had positive effects on veterans' occupational status and income. Additional statistics, demographic data, and other useful resources are elaborated in these areas that impact rural, women veterans. The top five rural states are South Dakota, West Virginia, Vermont, Mississippi, and Montana.

### DOL Grantee Interviews

The following questions (full list in report) were asked during interviews of program offices that included HVRP grant recipients and other DOL grantees. In the interviews, barriers to accessing employment, education/training, and health care services were the primary themes. The report summarizes their responses.

1. In your opinion, what are the challenges for veterans in transitioning from military to civilian employment?
2. What challenges do rural women veterans face in transitioning from military to civilian employment and why?
3. What programs exist to help rural women veterans' transition from military to civilian employment?
4. How do you communicate to and encourage rural women veterans to participate in these programs?
5. Do you work with women veterans still serving in the Guard and Reserve? If so, how does working with them differ from working with the discharged veteran population?
6. How do you work with those rural women veterans at risk?
7. How are employers being encouraged to hire rural women veterans?
8. How do you follow up with those rural women veterans who have gained employment through your programs?
9. How do you measure the effectiveness of these programs?

Female respondents from this study mentioned that women must be resilient and willing to persist by taking lesser jobs in rural areas until they can find jobs commensurate with their knowledge, skills, and abilities. In addition to experiencing challenges unique to women, respondents also mentioned that women veterans face barriers to transition that are common to all veterans regardless of gender.

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*Some lack understanding of civilian culture and the skills needed to compete with civilian peers who may have had time to complete advanced schooling and credentialing. Others cannot access jobs because they did not develop networks outside of the military.*

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### Recommendations

The following six recommendations are proposed for closing some of the program gaps:

1. Consider redesigning jobs and expanding telecommuting opportunities.
2. Establish and track rural employment metrics.
3. Update current outreach, education, and communications to meet gender-specific needs.
4. Reevaluate and re-communicate the role and structure of the state DVA offices.
5. Consider employment as essential to the health and well-being of veterans.
6. Form veteran-centered partnerships and collaborations.

Besides reviewing employment trends, this paper addresses the specific challenges of rural women veterans transitioning to the civilian workforce, identifies gaps in existing reentry assistance programs, and ultimately recommends methods by which transition programs and services can evolve to meet the needs of this growing population.