

Appendix B: Methodology

Securing a Sample

As BPW Foundation began to develop its research framework for the *Workingwomen Speak Out II: Women Veterans in Transition* project, it began by searching out a nationally representative database of women veterans to tap into.

This process quickly became its own interesting and ultimately frustrating research project. Currently, there is not a complete, publicly-available sampling frame for the population of women veterans that private researchers such as BPW Foundation can readily access. Large public databases with military personnel/veteran information such as those at the Department of Defense (DoD) or Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) can only be utilized by organizations authorized to conduct research on behalf of those agencies. For privacy reasons and because government resources can not be used for private purposes, access to these databases is strictly limited.

For organizations seeking to understand the attributes and resource needs of veterans (male and female) challenges exist to reaching out to a fully representative cross-section of this population. For those, that especially want to understand the forces shaping the lives of women veterans, it is particularly challenging.

BPW Foundation and its Board of Trustees felt strongly about the importance of the research project and made the decision to dedicate sufficient resources to conduct a pilot project on women veterans and their career transitions, even before other funding partners were secured. With funding for a pilot project approved, BPW Foundation began the process of securing a sample of women veterans.

In the first stages of building a sample of women veterans, BPW Foundation, working through the research firm of ResearchUSA, Inc., attempted to purchase a sample of women veteran e-mails from a survey sample firm. Lists of general mailing addresses for veterans (male and female) were available but could not be broken down by male or female, they also did not include e-mail addresses. BPW Foundation explored the option of a mailed survey, but it was outside the scope of this research project. The feasibility of securing sufficient numbers of women veterans and the cost of conducting such a survey were not feasible given the scope of the pilot research project. BPW Foundation also considered the feasibility of purchasing a large general market sample including e-mails and screening it for women vets, but given the small proportion of the U.S. population made up of women veterans (less than 1 percent), this also was deemed not to be feasible.

In its second stage of seeking a database with current information about women veterans including e-mail addresses, BPW Foundation contacted members of BPW/USA's *Women Joining Forces* Advisory Council, partner organizations with veteran databases and DoD. Privacy regulations prevented those representing government agencies from allowing BPW access to their databases. All databases (except the DoD ones) also represented opt-in samples of the population. Often, even government-funded surveys of women veterans are generally based on sampling from opt-in databases in which women veterans have opted in to the services of a given organization or agency such as the Department of Veteran Affairs or VA hospitals or clinics. In some instances, outside agencies that are contracted by DoD or a military branch to conduct research, for example, may have access to their databases which would contain the most comprehensive list of women who were ever in the military but would not necessarily contain current data about veterans.

Contacts within DoD's Defense Manpower Data Center were gracious enough to review BPW Foundation's request to e-mail the survey link to a sample drawn from DoD's database. Because of privacy regulations as well as stipulations that government resources cannot be used for private sources, this request could not be approved.

Building a nationally representative database of women veterans or even attempting to approximate one can be a very expensive proposition even for a government agency. Even so, it is encouraging to see that government agencies are attempting to expand the pool of data about veterans (including women veterans). Recently, a Veterans Supplement to the Current Population Survey was approved and implemented by the Bureau of Labor Statistics for August 2007. The August 2007 questionnaire, which was estimated by those interviewed to cost approximately \$400,000 to conduct, included revisions made to the supplement since the August 2005 edition.²⁷ The supplement provides information on the labor force status of veterans that have service-connected disabilities, are combat veterans, veterans of the National Guard and Reserve or recently discharged veterans. The

²⁷ Winter, Tim (Interview) (October 5, 2007) Transition Assistance Lead for the Department of Labor.

information is used by the Veterans Employment and Training Service and the Department of Veterans Affairs to determine policies that better meet the needs of veterans.²⁸ The August 2007 supplement also included questions about Reserve or National Guard status, branch of Armed Forces and combat exposure.²⁹ The Current Population Survey (CPS) covers a total of 60,000 households; those with veterans present were included in the Veteran Supplement. It is important to note that challenges exist even with CPS data for those trying to understand the lives of women veterans, explained those who work with women veterans. While the Veterans Supplement covers a fairly large sample, the information collected about women veterans is often not statistically significant when broken down into smaller slices such as rank, age or ethnicity.³⁰

Still, the ability to add on to the CPS or similar government-sponsored surveys is not one open to most private research organizations. Determined to begin its pilot project, BPW Foundation built a sample by utilizing the databases and outreach efforts of a collection of for-profit, nonprofit and government agencies whose outreach included a cross-section of women veterans actively engaged in the labor force. These included some organizations represented on the BPW/USA's *Women Joining Forces* (WJF) Advisory Council as well as other contacts developed through outreach for the WJF program. It was decided to limit overall outreach to a manageable number of partner organizations to make the survey duration and analysis manageable given BPW Foundation's time frame for completing the project and cost constraints. Organizations instrumental in helping BPW Foundation reach out to women veterans in order to take the survey included recruiting firms (RecruitMilitary, Corporate Gray, Bradley-Morris, Inc.) and service organizations (BPW/USA-Women Joining Forces, Women In Military Service For America Memorial, AMVETS, National Association of State Women Veterans Coordinators, New Mexico Department of Veterans Services).

Organizations that helped distribute information about the survey were able to provide varying degrees of outreach. Some organizations sent regular e-mail alerts to their databases of veterans over a period of three weeks from April through May 2007. For those unable to differentiate their databases between male or female veterans, the alert was sent to all members; those who could differentiate their contact information sent only to female veterans. For groups consisting of representatives of networks such as state-level veteran coordinators, for instance, notices were sent to the network's membership, and individual coordinators could opt to place the notice on their websites or in a newsletter or send to their specific database. One organization allowed flyers about the survey to be distributed at a state convention of women veterans.

Building an Instrument

Simultaneous with its attempts to secure a sample of women veterans, BPW Foundation began to develop the survey instrument. Input into the content of the survey instrument was provided by members of the *Women Joining Forces* Advisory Council, which consists of representatives of veteran service organizations, governmental agencies and corporate supporters.³¹ Members of BPW Foundation's Research and Education Committee also provided input and insight to the research team.³² The survey instrument adapts elements from prior studies including issues important to workingwomen (*Workingwomen Speak Out*, 2004), employee skills and attributes that are important to employers (*SCANS Report For America: 2000*) as well as reflects original questions and ideas emerging out of the research process.

This launch report reflects the beginning of a pilot study that will include deeper analysis of the data from the survey and the use of focus groups and interviews with women veterans, employers, veteran service organizations and government agencies to probe questions emerging from the analysis. BPW Foundation will also collaborate with other agencies to encourage the expansion of research about the career transition experiences of veterans beyond this initial pilot project into a broader and more comprehensive examination of the experiences, attributes and needs of transitioning female and male veterans.

²⁸ Federal Register, Vol. 72, No. 37/ Monday, February 26, 2007/Notices

²⁹ Currently, results from the August 2005 CPS may be requested from the Bureau of Labor; the August 2007 results will be released in summer 2008.

³⁰ Manning, Lory (Interview) (Summer 2007). Women's Research and Education Institute.

³¹ Visit the Women Veterans in Transition web page at www.bpwfoundation.org for a listing of the WJF Advisory Council members.

³² Visit the Women Veterans in Transition web page at www.bpwfoundation.org for a listing of the Research and Education Committee members.

Strengths and Limitations of Sample

Data for this study comes from an internet-based opt-in survey of women veterans obtained from a limited pool of various non-governmental agencies that had available sources of women veteran e-mail addresses. Because researchers were unable to obtain permission to use an exhaustive list of women veterans and, as there does not exist a nationally representative database, it is therefore impossible to estimate the extent to which the survey base is like or dislike the actual population under study. For this reason, the researchers are cautious in drawing generalized conclusions where it is not possible, but this caution may not suffice to alleviate potential sampling problems. Therefore, the researchers caution readers to consider the extent to which the full population of women veterans might be different from those invited to participate in this study as they form opinions about the research conclusions.

As with any research that incorporates a survey as a means to gather data, BPW Foundation's Women's Veterans data is subject to a number of potential limitations. Where possible and if applicable, the researchers in connection with this research project will make every effort to fully identify and address these risks when discussing specific results. Additionally, BPW Foundation will supplement quantitative data with qualitative information gathered through a variety of sources over the course of the pilot study.

As a general disclaimer, in this and future reports, the reader should be aware of some possible issues. Since the survey sample is not completely random, while examination may still be suitable for specific situations, the results of the study may not be appropriate to generalize without appropriate analysis. BPW Foundation is in the process of evaluating whether the sample size can make inferences regarding the total population of women veterans. In the study, BPW Foundation targeted eight organizations to gather survey responses. From these organizations, greater than 70 percent of the respondents came from three organizations and some branches of service and age groups are more represented than others. Veterans who are not connected to an established group may not have been reached, and an online survey may tend to have a bias towards more computer literate users.

Survey data analyses also frequently bear common data issues. While surveys are effective in establishing relationships between key variables, they often cannot determine causality. Since the survey is "self-reported," there is potential for inaccurate response, due to over- or under-reporting, personal motivation, ability to definitively recall topics, or simple response error. While the data may bear some risk, it represents an unprecedented view into the experiences of women veterans.

The information collected as part of the study provides researchers and policymakers the ability to gain first-hand information to study and promote successful transition for women veterans to the civilian workforce. Over 60 percent of respondents agreed to participate in follow-up focus groups and interviews, allowing BPW Foundation to delve deeper into the circumstances and events facing veterans. This continued involvement will provide BPW Foundation the opportunity to control some of the external factors affecting survey response and gain even more insight into the transitions of women veterans.

Research Team

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Also contributing to the research project were members of BPW Foundation's Research and Education Committee (2006-2007 and 2007-2008) and BPW/USA's Women Joining Forces Advisory Council.