

# Characteristics of Female Veterans—An Analytic View Across Age-Cohorts: 2015

*American Community Survey Briefs*

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## INTRODUCTION

As women who served in the armed forces transition from military to civilian life, some differences between the new veterans and their nonveteran counterparts exist. In some cases, these differences may linger for some time as they age. This segment of veterans is one of the highest priority groups of interest of both the Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Labor.<sup>1</sup> Female veterans are a small subpopulation of both veterans and civilian women as a whole, making them an often under-studied population. In 2015, 1.6 million women were veterans of the armed forces. They accounted for 8.4 percent of the total veteran population and 1.2 percent of the total adult female population. Eighty-two percent of all female veterans were of working-age (18 to 64 years old), compared with 79.0 percent of all nonveteran women.

This brief examines the transition of female veterans from the military to civilian life. As there is no perfect measure of this transition, nor perfect data that align to the life course of veterans, this analysis uses three different age snapshots as career proxies to determine if female veterans are different from nonveterans throughout their working ages, or if the differences are more prominent at the early stage of the transition from military to civilian life. The data used in this brief are from the 2015 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year estimates and represent the civilian population

<sup>1</sup> For more information about Department of Veterans Affairs, see <[www.womenshealth.va.gov/WOMENSHEALTH/programoverview/strategic\\_priorities.asp](http://www.womenshealth.va.gov/WOMENSHEALTH/programoverview/strategic_priorities.asp)> and for more information about Department of Labor, see <[www.dol.gov/vets/womenveterans/](http://www.dol.gov/vets/womenveterans/)>.

of women 18 to 64 years old living in the United States.

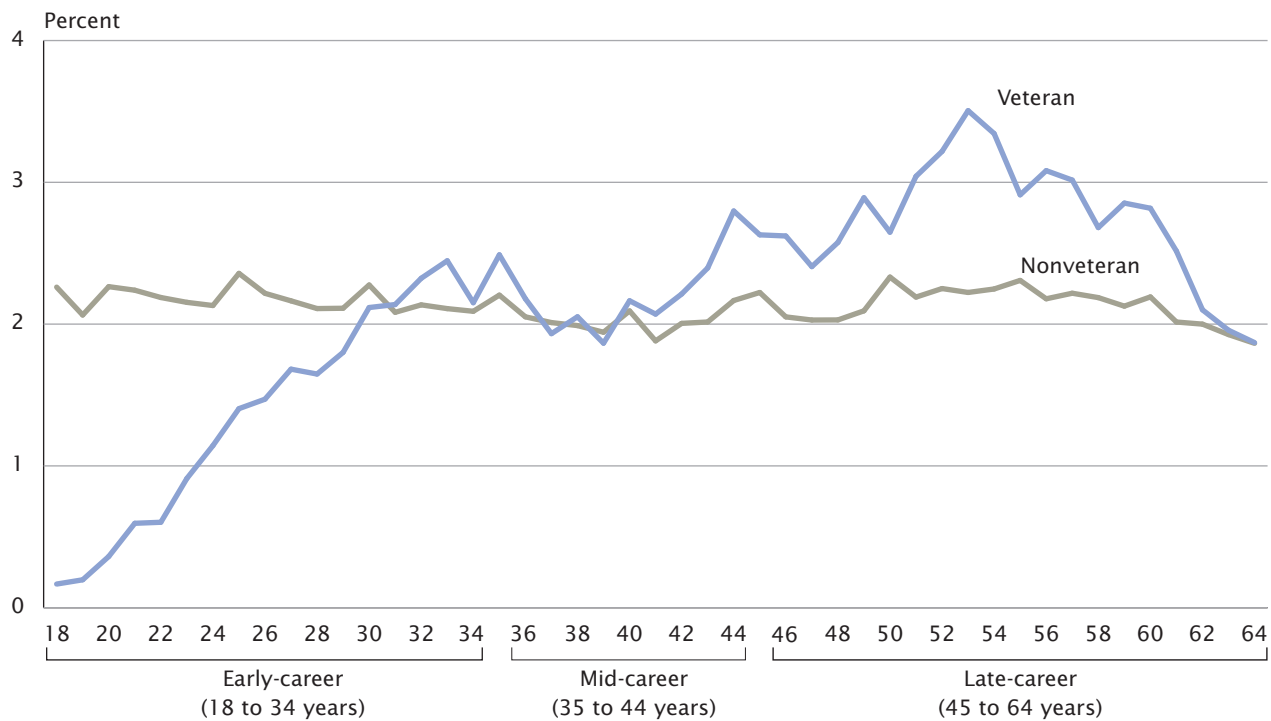
The ACS does not have a measure of years of work experience, therefore age is being used as a proxy in this brief. Women are categorized by age groups that correspond with approximate career stages. Women between the ages of 18 to 34 were considered early-career, those between the ages of 35 to 44 were mid-career, and those 45 to 64 years old were late-career.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF FEMALE VETERANS AND NONVETERANS

The age distributions of women vary by veteran status, particularly among the early-career group (see Figure 1). This is primarily because female veterans are typically still serving in the military between the ages of 18 and 24. By age 25, many female service members begin the transition to veterans. There is a peak in the female veteran age distribution at the age of 53, reflecting the increase in the number of women who entered the military at the start of the All Volunteer Force in 1973. In contrast, the age makeup of female nonveterans is relatively stable across the entire age range. Overall, the median age of female veterans was higher than female nonveterans only in the early-career age group, while not significantly different in the older age groups (see Table 1).

A higher percentage of early-career aged female veterans were married compared with their nonveteran counterparts (see Figure 2). The marriage pool experienced during military service and benefits available to married members of the military may serve

Figure 1.  
**Percentage of Female Veterans and Nonveterans by Single Year of Age: 2015**



Note: For more information, see <[www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/)>.  
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates.

to encourage female veterans to marry at a younger age while still serving in the military.<sup>2,3</sup>

A lower percentage of female veterans who were mid-career and late-career were married than their female nonveteran counterparts. Early-career female veterans had a higher percentage with a child in the household than did early-career nonveterans. The lowest percentage of both female veterans and nonveterans with a child in the

household were in the late-career group.

Early-career nonveterans were more likely to have a bachelor's degree or higher than veterans. The opposite was true for mid-career women, with female veterans having a higher percentage with a bachelor's degree or higher. Female veterans may delay their education by going into the military service, therefore it may take female veterans longer to complete a bachelor's degree. Female veterans may also be taking advantage of the educational benefits provided by the GI Bill after military service, acquiring their degrees at an older age than female nonveterans, so is not surprising that they surpass female nonveterans by mid-career ages.<sup>4</sup> A higher

percentage of female veterans were also enrolled in college compared with female nonveterans, across all age groups (see Figure 2).

### EMPLOYMENT OF FEMALE VETERANS AND NONVETERANS

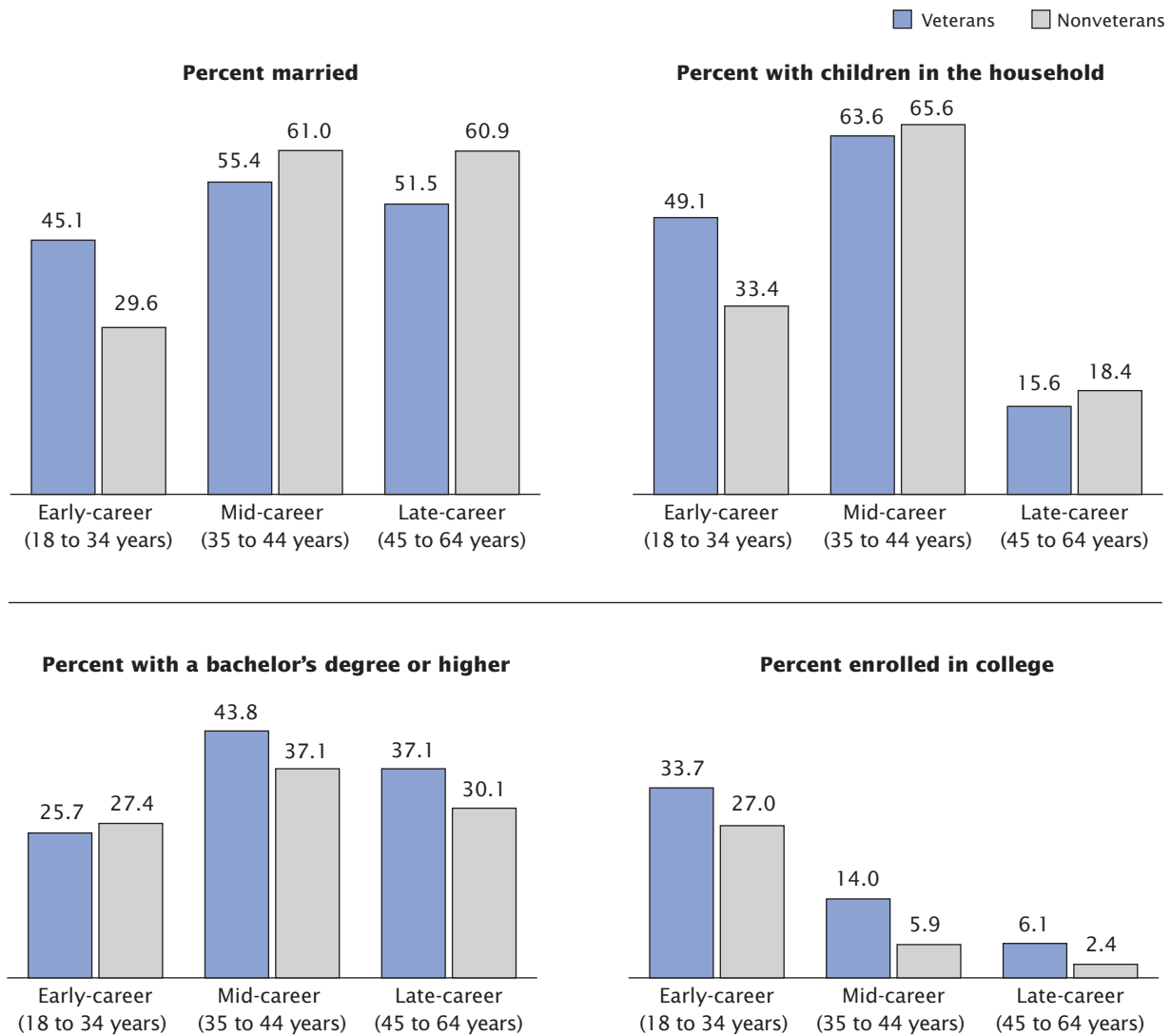
As a percentage of their respective populations, early-career and mid-career female veterans were employed at higher rates than were female nonveterans (see Figure 3). Female veterans and nonveterans who were in the mid-career age group had a higher percentage employed than those in the other age groups. Veterans and nonveterans in the late-career age category had the lowest percentage employed. A higher percentage of female nonveterans in all age groups were not in the labor force

<sup>2</sup> National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, "America's Women Veterans: Military Service History and VA Benefit Utilization Statistics," National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington, DC, November 2011, <[www.va.gov/VETDATA/docs/SpecialReports/Final\\_Womens\\_Report\\_3\\_2\\_12\\_v\\_7.pdf](http://www.va.gov/VETDATA/docs/SpecialReports/Final_Womens_Report_3_2_12_v_7.pdf)>.

<sup>3</sup> The difference in age structure between female veterans and nonveterans may affect some of the characteristic differences for the early-career age group.

<sup>4</sup> For more information about the Department of Veterans Affairs GI Bill, see <<http://benefits.va.gov/gibill/>>.

Figure 2.  
**Selected Characteristics of Female Veterans and Nonveterans by Age: 2015**



Note: For more information, see <[www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/)>.  
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates.

compared with their veteran counterparts (see Table 1).

A higher percentage of employed female veterans were employed full-time, year-round (35 hours or more per week for 50 to 52 weeks) than female nonveterans, regardless of age (see Figure 4).

The largest difference was for the early-career female veterans and nonveterans (68.7 percent and 54.9 percent, respectively). Full-time, year-round employed female veterans had higher median earnings in each age group (see Table 1).

Female nonveterans were more likely to be self-employed than female veterans overall, regardless of age (see Figure 4). The relationship between age and self-employment, however, was similar for both veterans and nonveterans. The highest percentages of female veterans and nonveterans who

Table 1.  
**Selected Characteristics of Female Veterans and Nonveterans by Age: 2015**

Characteristic	Total (18–64 years old)				Early-career (18–34 years old)				Mid-career (35–44 years old)				Late-career (45–64 years old)			
	Veterans		Nonveterans		Veterans		Nonveterans		Veterans		Nonveterans		Veterans		Nonveterans	
	Percent	Margin of error (±)	Percent	Margin of error (±)	Percent	Margin of error (±)	Percent	Margin of error (±)	Percent	Margin of error (±)	Percent	Margin of error (±)	Percent	Margin of error (±)	Percent	Margin of error (±)
<b>Total population 18 to 64 years old</b> .....	<b>1,290,977</b>	<b>17,963</b>	<b>99,134,471</b>	<b>23,290</b>	<b>298,951</b>	<b>9,686</b>	<b>36,635,123</b>	<b>28,208</b>	<b>286,054</b>	<b>9,793</b>	<b>20,184,087</b>	<b>23,198</b>	<b>705,972</b>	<b>12,785</b>	<b>42,315,261</b>	<b>25,437</b>
<b>Median Age (in years)</b> .....	<b>46.8</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>41.4</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>29.8</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>26.4</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>40.3</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>40.0</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>54.5</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>54.9</b>	<b>0.1</b>
<b>Marital Status</b>																
Married .....	50.9	0.7	49.4	0.1	45.1	1.7	29.6	0.2	55.4	1.6	61.0	0.2	51.5	0.8	60.9	0.1
Divorced .....	24.8	0.6	12.2	0.1	16.6	1.3	3.6	0.1	23.1	1.3	13.3	0.1	28.9	0.7	19.2	0.1
Widowed or separated .....	6.7	0.3	5.3	0.1	4.8	0.7	1.9	0.1	5.3	0.8	4.9	0.1	8.1	0.5	8.4	0.1
Never married .....	17.6	0.6	33.1	0.1	33.5	1.5	65.0	0.2	16.2	1.2	20.8	0.1	11.5	0.6	11.5	0.1
<b>Children<sup>1</sup></b>																
Has child in the household .....	34.0	0.7	33.5	0.1	49.1	1.5	33.4	0.1	63.6	1.6	65.6	0.2	15.6	0.6	18.4	0.1
No child in the household .....	66.0	0.7	66.5	0.1	50.9	1.5	66.6	0.1	36.4	1.6	34.4	0.2	84.4	0.6	81.6	0.1
<b>Educational Attainment</b>																
High school diploma or less .....	17.3	0.6	35.3	0.1	18.0	1.5	33.2	0.2	12.9	1.1	32.3	0.2	18.9	0.7	38.5	0.1
Some college .....	46.7	0.7	34.1	0.1	56.3	1.8	39.3	0.2	43.3	1.7	30.6	0.2	44.1	1.0	31.3	0.1
Bachelor's degree or higher .....	35.9	0.7	30.5	0.1	25.7	1.6	27.4	0.2	43.8	1.4	37.1	0.2	37.1	0.8	30.1	0.1
<b>School Enrollment</b>																
Enrolled in college .....	14.2	0.5	12.2	0.1	33.7	1.6	27.0	0.1	14.0	1.1	5.9	0.1	6.1	0.4	2.4	0.1
Not enrolled in college .....	85.8	0.5	87.8	0.1	66.3	1.6	73.0	0.1	86.0	1.1	94.1	0.1	93.9	0.4	97.6	0.1
<b>Poverty</b>																
In poverty .....	10.5	0.5	15.7	0.1	13.4	1.0	21.3	0.2	10.2	1.0	14.9	0.2	9.3	0.5	11.5	0.1
Not in poverty .....	89.5	0.5	84.3	0.1	86.6	1.0	78.7	0.2	89.8	1.0	85.1	0.2	90.7	0.5	88.5	0.1
<b>Employment Status</b>																
In civilian labor force .....	72.3	0.6	71.1	0.1	75.8	1.5	72.9	0.1	78.6	1.3	75.9	0.2	68.3	0.9	67.2	0.1
Employed .....	94.3	0.4	93.9	0.1	91.5	1.0	91.5	0.1	94.6	0.7	94.7	0.1	95.4	0.4	95.7	0.1
Unemployed .....	5.7	0.4	6.1	0.1	8.5	1.0	8.5	0.1	5.4	0.7	5.3	0.1	4.6	0.3	4.3	0.1
Not in the labor force .....	27.7	0.6	28.9	0.1	24.2	1.5	27.1	0.1	21.4	1.3	24.1	0.2	31.7	0.9	32.8	0.1
<b>Total employed population 18 to 64 years old</b> .....	<b>879,775</b>	<b>15,647</b>	<b>66,143,427</b>	<b>74,324</b>	<b>207,343</b>	<b>8,396</b>	<b>24,440,076</b>	<b>49,360</b>	<b>212,514</b>	<b>8,511</b>	<b>14,503,671</b>	<b>64,723</b>	<b>459,918</b>	<b>18,358</b>	<b>27,199,680</b>	<b>88,869</b>
<b>Work Status</b>																
Full-time, year-round .....	75.1	0.7	64.6	0.1	68.7	1.8	54.9	0.1	76.7	1.6	70.5	0.2	77.2	0.9	70.2	0.1
Less than full-time, year-round ..	24.9	0.7	35.4	0.1	31.3	1.8	45.1	0.1	23.3	1.6	29.5	0.2	22.8	0.9	29.8	0.1
<b>Class of Worker<sup>2</sup></b>																
Private worker .....	60.1	0.8	77.0	0.1	60.3	2.1	84.9	0.1	60.5	1.6	75.2	0.2	59.9	1.0	70.8	0.2
Local, state, federal government ..	34.8	0.8	16.0	0.1	37.1	2.0	11.5	0.1	34.9	1.7	17.1	0.2	33.7	0.9	19.5	0.1
Self-employed .....	5.0	0.3	6.9	0.1	2.7	0.6	3.5	0.1	4.4	0.6	7.5	0.1	6.3	0.4	9.5	0.1
<b>Poverty</b>																
In poverty .....	5.1	0.4	8.6	0.1	8.7	1.1	13.7	0.1	5.2	0.8	7.8	0.1	3.4	0.4	4.4	0.1
Not in poverty .....	94.9	0.4	91.4	0.1	91.3	1.1	86.3	0.1	94.8	0.8	92.2	0.1	96.6	0.4	95.6	0.1
<b>Median earnings (in 2015 inflation-adjusted dollars)</b>																
All employed .....	\$30,080	926	\$29,726	107	\$30,884	619	\$21,130	56	\$41,186	853	\$35,547	115	\$42,067	609	\$35,752	91
Full-time, year-round .....	\$45,509	555	\$39,927	129	\$36,304	1,150	\$31,790	110	\$47,444	3,058	\$42,060	161	\$49,810	1,994	\$43,398	462

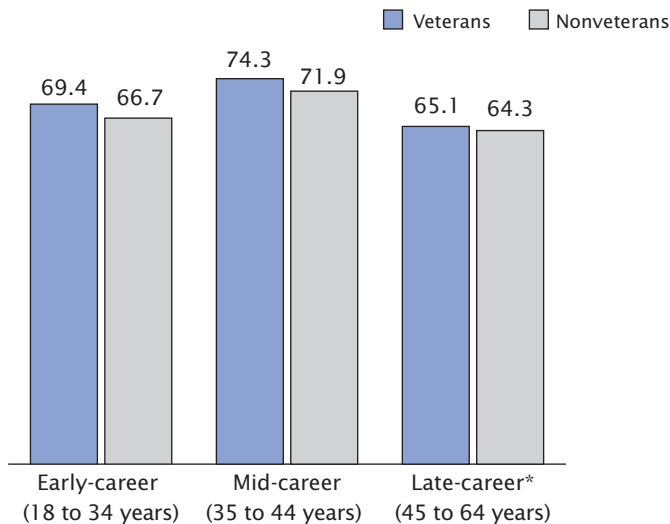
<sup>1</sup> Only includes children of the householder, spouse, or is the grandchild of the householder and the parent is present.

<sup>2</sup> Does not include unpaid family workers. Totals may not sum to 100 percent.

Note: For more information, see <[www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/)>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates.

Figure 3.  
**Employment-Population Ratio of Female Veterans and Nonveterans by Age: 2015**



\* Denotes that estimates do not differ significantly.

Note: For more information, see <[www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/)>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates.

were self-employed were in the late-career group (6.3 percent and 9.5 percent, respectively), while the lowest percentages were in the early-career group (2.7 percent and 3.5 percent, respectively).

A higher percentage of female veterans were employed in the government (includes local, state, and federal government) than nonveterans, regardless of age (see Figure 4). The largest difference was for early-career aged veterans and nonveterans (37.1 percent and 11.5 percent, respectively). The percentage of female veterans employed in the government decreased by age while the percentage of female nonveterans increased by age.

## DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTS

**Veteran:** An individual who has served (even for a short time), but is not now serving on active duty in the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard.

**Civilian labor force:** All people classified as employed or unemployed, excludes U.S. Armed Forces.

**Not in labor force:** All people who are not classified as members of the labor force. This category consists mainly of students, homemakers, retired workers, seasonal workers interviewed in an off season who were not looking for work, institutionalized people, and people doing only incidental unpaid family work (less than 15 hours during the reference week).

**Employed:** This category includes all civilians who either (1) were “at work,” that is, those who did any work at all during the reference week as paid employees, worked in their own business or profession, worked on their own farm, or worked 15 hours or more as unpaid workers on a family farm or in a family business; or (2) were “with a job but not at work,” that is, those who did not work during the reference week but had jobs or businesses from which they were temporarily absent due to illness, bad weather, industrial dispute, vacation, or other personal reasons. Excluded from the employed are people whose only activity consisted of work around the house or unpaid volunteer work for religious, charitable, and similar organizations; also excluded are all institutionalized people and people on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces.

**Unemployed:** This category includes all civilians classified as unemployed if they (1) were neither “at work” nor “with a job but not at work” during the reference week, and (2) were actively looking for work during the last 4 weeks, and (3) were available to start a job. Also included as unemployed are civilians who did not work at all during the reference week, were waiting to be called back to a job from which they had been laid off, and were available for work except for temporary illness.

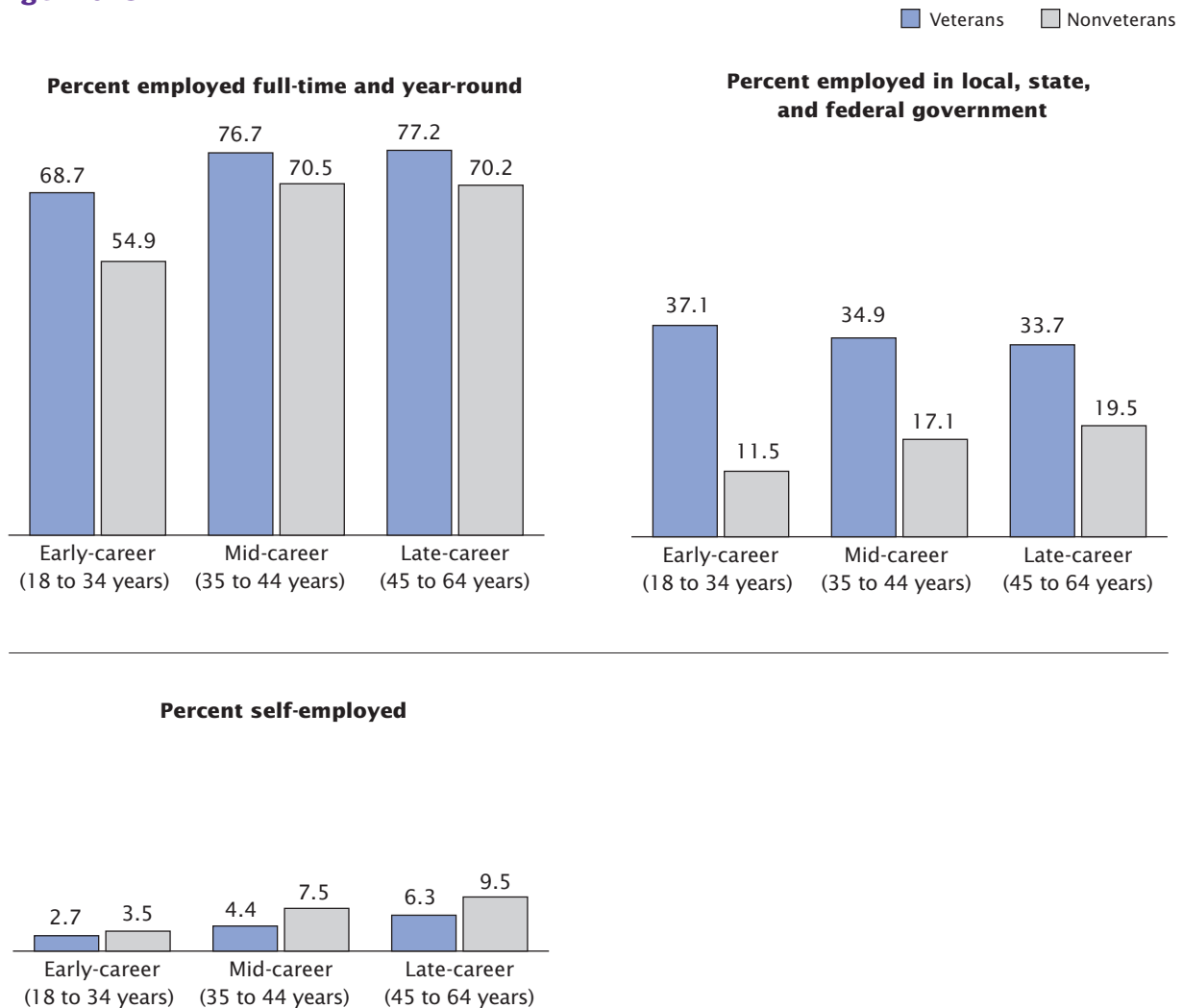
**SUMMARY**

This brief describes working-age female veterans and nonveterans and how they differed for key characteristics. Early-career female veterans were older, married, have a

child in the household, and enrolled in college at higher rates than early-career female nonveterans. Mid- and late-career female veterans were more likely to be enrolled in college and to have a Bachelor's degree or higher compared with

similarly aged nonveterans. Female veterans, in all age groups, were more likely to be employed, work full-time, year-round, work in the government, and have higher median earnings than their nonveteran counterparts.

Figure 4.  
**Selected Characteristics of Employed Female Veterans and Nonveterans by Age: 2015**



Note: For more information, see <[www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/)>.  
 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2015 American Community Survey, 1-year estimates.

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## **MORE INFORMATION**

For more information about veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces, go to the U.S. Census Bureau's Web site on veteran statistics at <[www.census.gov/topics/population/veterans.html](http://www.census.gov/topics/population/veterans.html)>.

## **SOURCE AND ACCURACY**

Data presented in this brief are based on people and households that responded to the ACS in 2015 and are subject to sampling and nonsampling error. All comparisons presented in this report have taken sampling error into account and are significant at the 90 percent confidence level, unless otherwise noted. Due to rounding, some

details may not sum to totals. For information on sampling and estimation methods, confidentiality protection, and sampling and non-sampling errors, please see the "ACS Accuracy of the Data" document located at <[www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/technical-documentation/code-lists.html](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/technical-documentation/code-lists.html)>.