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### Research Review: "Veteran Single Parents, Surviving but Not Thriving"

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RESEARCH REVIEW | ISSUE 263

## ■ Veteran Single Parents, Surviving but Not Thriving

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**SOURCE:** RAND Corporation**YEAR:** 2024**PUBLICATION TYPE:** Research Report**LINK:** <https://doi.org/10.7249/RRA1363-6>**KEYWORDS:** Financial Decision Making, Military Caregivers, Military Families, Veterans Education, Veterans Employment, Veterans' Health Care, Women's Health**ABSTRACT:**

“The changing demographics of the military demand that policymakers pay greater attention to veteran parents, particularly mothers. Women represent the fastest-growing population in the veteran community (Holder, 2010). Currently, women make up about 10 percent of the overall veteran population, and that percentage is expected to increase by 50 percent by 2035 (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs [VA], 2017). Despite these statistics, few studies have focused on the impact of veteran status, gender, and parenthood on well-being outcomes and access to care (e.g., VA, 2017). This study expands our knowledge of the current experience of veteran single parents in the United States by answering the following research questions: 1) What are the demographic characteristics of veterans who served after September 11, 2001 (post-9/11 veteran) single parents, and how do they compare with veteran coupled parents and nonveteran single parents? 2) How do veteran single parents compare with nonveteran single parents and veteran coupled parents in terms of financial stability? 3) How do veteran single parents compare with nonveteran single parents and veteran parents in terms of mental and physical health and health care access?”

**RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS:**

- This study utilized data from the ACS (an ongoing survey of the Census Bureau), Current Population Survey (CPS), Food Security Supplement (FSS), and Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), along with qualitative interviews with 11 veteran single parents in higher education, to investigate the financial and health needs of this demographic to examine the demographic characteristics, financial stability, and health outcomes of post-9/11 veteran single parents in comparison to veteran couple parents and nonveteran single parents.
- Research uncovered that 1.2% of veteran parents, totaling nearly 300,000 individuals, identified as single parents, compared to 1.8% of nonveteran parents. These veteran single parents, especially black females, face significant socioeconomic disparities, including lower incomes and higher rates of food insecurity, despite demonstrating resilience through higher rates of enrollment in higher education and employment.
- Research indicates that veteran single parents, especially black female veterans, confront notable socioeconomic gaps compared to veteran couples, including lower incomes, heightened food insecurity, and reduced homeownership rates. Despite these obstacles, they exhibit resilience through increased enrollment in higher education and employment.
- This study contributes to the understanding of veteran single parents in the United States by examining their demographic characteristics, financial stability, and health outcomes compared to veteran coupled parents and nonveteran single parents. The research also investigates disparities across these factors by race, ethnicity, and gender.

## Implications

### FOR PRACTICE

Practitioners should implement customized transition services specifically designed to meet the unique needs of veteran single parents, encompassing personalized career counseling, readily available and affordable childcare solutions, and guidance in accessing essential financial aid. It's imperative that these services be inclusive and accommodating to single fathers, ensuring equitable support across genders. Furthermore, healthcare professionals must prioritize offering targeted mental health assistance to veteran single mothers, given the heightened prevalence of mental health challenges within this group. By providing accessible mental health services, caregivers can effectively enhance the well-being of both mothers and their children, fostering healthier family dynamics and outcomes.

### FOR POLICY

The findings offer valuable insights for policymakers aiming to allocate resources effectively to address the contemporary needs of veteran parents, especially those who are single. Policymakers should prioritize providing enhanced financial support for veteran single parents during their transition from military service to civilian life. This support should address the unique challenges faced by single parents, including limited income and increased demands on time and resources. Findings from this report also support a need for federal programs specifically tailored to provide childcare support for veteran single parents. Existing programs should be expanded to ensure accessibility for all veterans with young children, addressing the gap in services currently experienced by many. To address the unique needs of veteran single parents, policy recommendations include targeted transition services, federal financial support for childcare, assistance for single parents in higher education, mental health care provision for single mothers, and encouragement for single fathers to seek primary care. These measures aim to mitigate disparities, improve access to resources, and enhance overall well-being for veteran single parents and their families.

### FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should explore the underlying factors driving differences in financial well-being and health outcomes among veteran single parents, veteran coupled parents, and nonveteran parents. Advanced statistical analyses can help isolate the key factors influencing these outcomes. Continued research focusing on subgroups of veteran parents, particularly those from minority ethnic and racial backgrounds, can provide insights into their unique experiences and needs. Understanding these nuances can inform the development of more targeted policies and support services. Further investigation into how different child custody or support arrangements impact veteran single parents is warranted. Research should examine how these arrangements influence financial pressures and overall well-being, especially considering the potential complexities involved in military and veteran single parenthood.

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