

The Health of Veterans: Findings from the National Health Interview Survey

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The well-being of military families is a topic of current interest to public health and policy experts. There is concern about the negative effects of extended overseas deployments on the health and well-being of service people and their family members and about their readjustment to civilian life (Institute of Medicine 2010). Many studies on this topic are drawn from convenience samples and/or military or veteran databases, which limit their ability to draw meaningful comparisons with the non-veteran population (Chandra et al. 2010). In addition, data on veterans' health from the Veterans Health Administration do not capture the experience of the entire population of veterans (see Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics, Older Americans 2010, indicator 35). The National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) is an underutilized source for studying community-dwelling veterans, especially non-elderly veterans.

We have 3 primary aims in this paper:

1. Describe the socio-demographic profile of non-institutionalized veterans, including age, race/ethnicity, sex, marital status, education, poverty status, and family structure.
2. Describe the health and health care utilization of veterans compared to non-veterans among the non-institutionalized population using a variety of measures such as self-reported health, disability status, prevalence of chronic diseases, mental health, use of alcohol, smoking behavior, usual source of care, use of mental health services, hospital emergency room visits, and health insurance status.
3. Compare the health status of veterans over time on selected measures.

Data and Methods:

We use the NHIS core and sample adult files from 2007-2010. For trend analyses, we will also use files from 1997-2000.

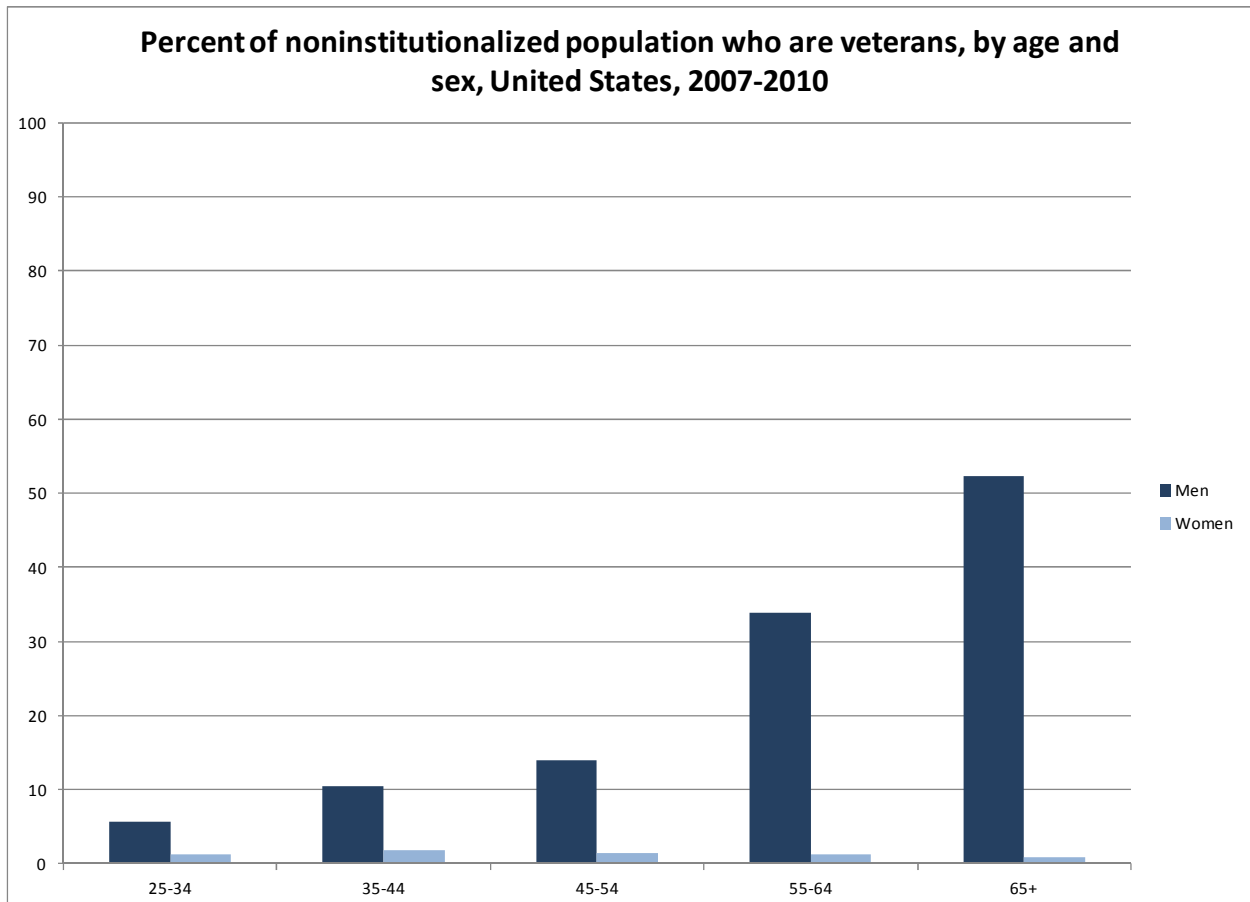
Veterans are self-identified in the NHIS. In the family core of the survey, adults aged 18 and over are asked if they have “ever been honorably discharged from active duty in the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard?” The question in this form has been asked consistently since 1997. First, we will compare the number of veterans covered by the NHIS with outside sources, in particular with VetPop, the official estimate of the veterans population from the VA (<http://www.va.gov/VETDATA/Demographics/Demographics.asp>), recognizing that NHIS will miss veterans who are homeless, jailed, institutionalized, or who served in the National Guard or Reserves.

We will present descriptive statistics (e.g., weighted percent of population with a particular condition or socio-demographic attribute), using Sudaan to calculate standard errors. For non-elderly ages, we will use 10-year age groups because of the relatively small numbers of veterans at younger ages. Logistic regressions may be used to control for confounding effects of covariates. Because the number of female veterans is small, we will focus our analysis on male veterans.

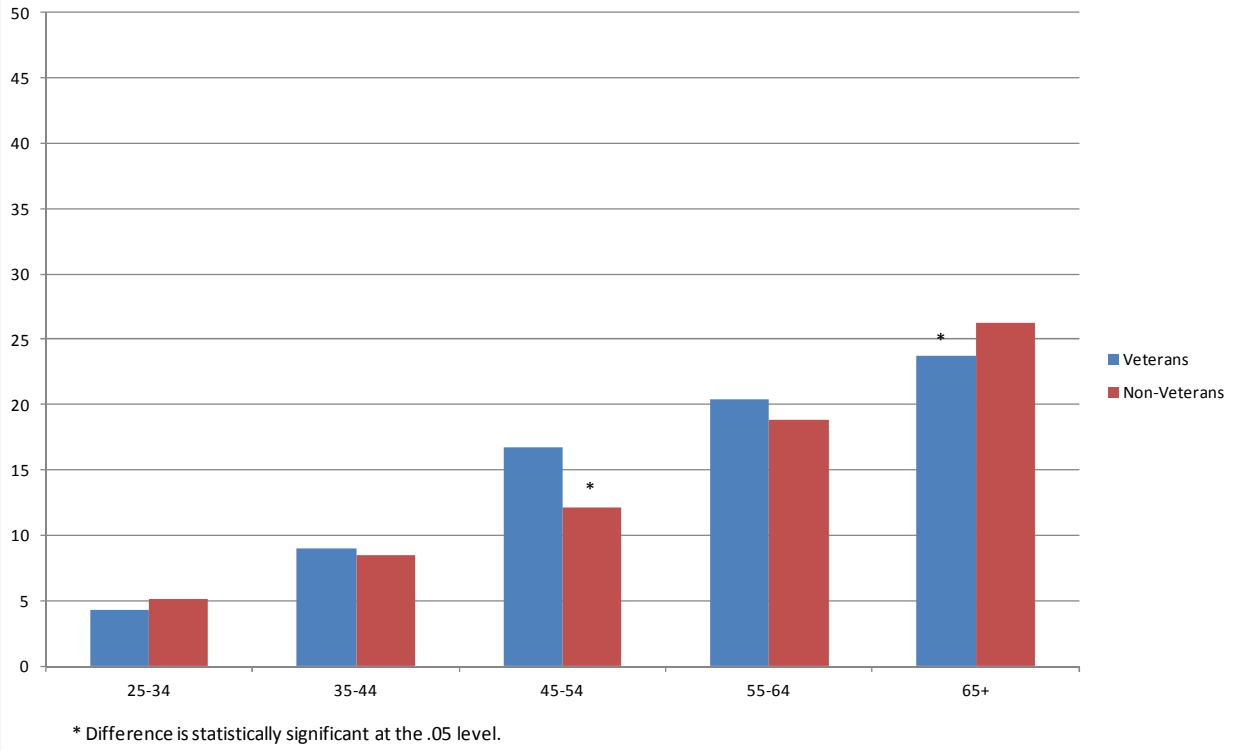
Preliminary Results:

Veterans make up a substantial proportion of the noninstitutionalized population aged 55 and older (34 percent of men aged 55-64 and 52 percent of men aged 65 and older). A snapshot view of their health in 2007-2010 reveals a mixed picture: Veterans aged 45-54 are more likely to report fair or poor health than non-veterans, while older veterans (age 65 and older) are less likely to report their health as fair or poor. Higher rates of current smoking are reported by non-elderly veterans compared to non-veterans. Veterans are less likely to have no health insurance compared with non-veterans and more likely to report having seen or talked to a mental health professional in the past year.

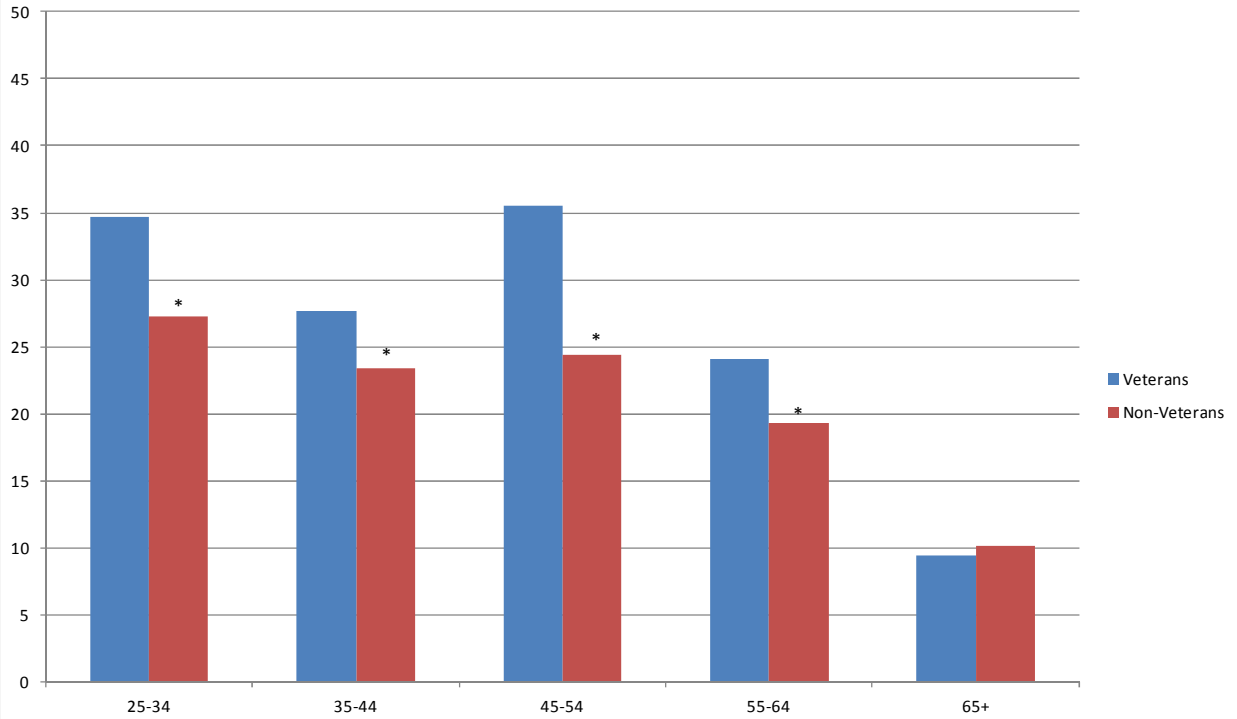
Sample of Charts for Poster:



Percent of noninstitutionalized male population who report fair or poor health, by age and veteran status, United States, 2007-2010

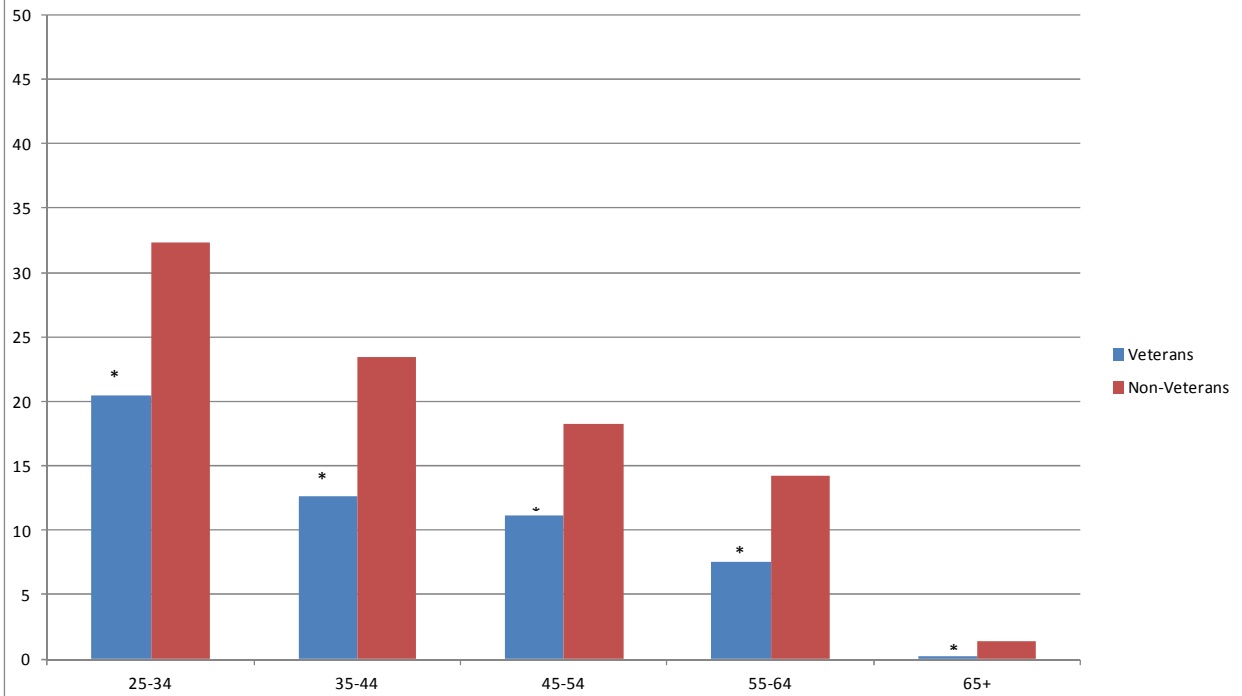


Percent of noninstitutionalized male population who report being current smokers by age and veteran status, United States, 2007-2010



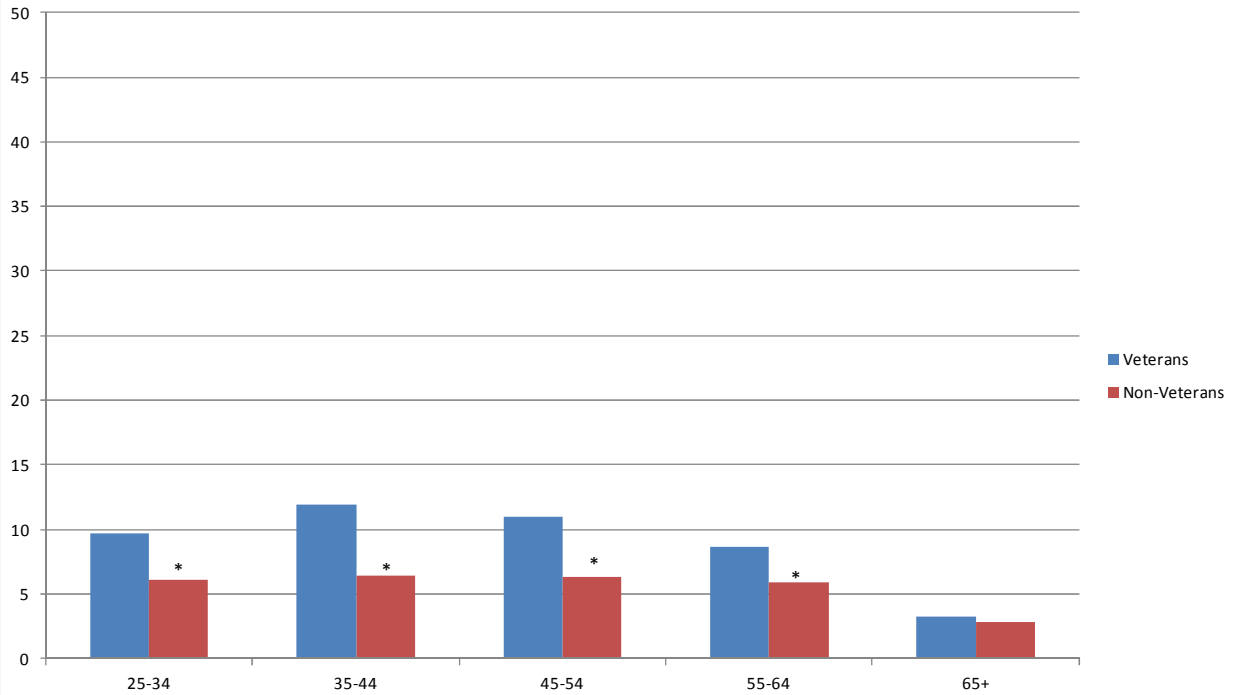
* Difference is statistically significant at the .05 level.

Percent of noninstitutionalized male population who report no health insurance by age and veteran status, United States, 2007-2010



* Difference is statistically significant at the .05 level.

Percent of noninstitutionalized male population who report having seen or talked to a mental health professional in the past 12 months, by age and veteran status, United States, 2007-2010



* Difference is statistically significant at the .05 level.

References

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