



## Women Veterans: Transitions David Bush<sup>1</sup>, Annette E. Craven<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

*The purpose of this study was to determine whether there are common themes regarding emotional, familial and social adaptation because of the female veterans' transition from the military to the civilian workforce, many of whom exit the armed forces with some level of disability. Whether transitioning into education, employment, or retired status, each female service member must make numerous decisions while facing aspects of cultural adaptation that must be commensurate with her change in status. A review of the available literature reveals that the woman veteran is an underrepresented population and that additional research is needed. This complex review of the literature examines existing research into the process of women veterans' transition from military service into civilian life. In addition, it presents a framework for applying the Veterans' Self-Identity Development Theory to the female veteran transitional process. The results of this study may assist policymakers in the development and implementation of policies that support transitioning female veterans. It may also assist educators in meeting the needs of female veterans, particularly those with physical, mental, and/or emotional disabilities.*

*Keywords: female veteran, Veterans' Self-Identity Development Theory, education, emotional adaptation, familial adaptation, social adaptation, career transition*

### Introduction

This paper is a reflection of an integrative literature in support of a research agenda to determine whether there are common themes related to the female veterans' transition from military to civilian employment and ultimately an opportunity to create a framework for applying the Veterans' Self-Identity Development Theory. According to Torraco [1], "an integrative literature review of a mature topic addresses the need for a review, critique, and the potential reconceptualization of the expanding and more diversified knowledge base of the topic as it continues to develop." The first step in creating the integrative literature review was to identify research spanning the 25-year period of 1992-2017 as it relates to female veterans and career transitions. Once key literature was identified, each was evaluated to identify the purpose of the research and the participants involved. This was followed by a critical analysis to determine relevance to the research agenda of this study. Key data sources included (a) *Bibliography of Military Career Transition Research, 2000-2014* [2], which was later updated to include research up to and including 2016; (b) University of the Incarnate Word library databases; (c) Wayland Baptist University databases; and (d) Google Scholar. When search library databases, the keywords female veterans, women veterans, career transition, veterans, and transition were utilized. Initial searches using the keywords *female veterans* and *women veterans* resulted in 44,206 peer-reviewed journals. Refining the search to only include articles reduced that number to 42,359. Adding the keyword transition to the initial search reduced the number to 6,363. Limiting the time span to 25 years—1992-2017—reduced the number to 6,120. Limiting the search further to include research studies studies reduced the number to 617. A final refinement to the discipline areas of social sciences and management and the geographic parameter of the United States reduced the number to 297. An exhaustive analysis of the 297 possible relevant sources yielded a result of eight articles and one book review, which, in combination to resources from the Buzzetta et al. [2] bibliography and the Google Scholar search resulted in a total of 51 usable resources.

### National Career Development Association Research

A 2014 article by Robertson, Miles and Mallen titled *Career transition and military veterans: An overview of literature from 2000 to 2013* [3], was commissioned by the Veterans' Committee of the National Career Development Association (NCDA). This overview segregated existing research into the categories of female veterans, veterans with disabilities, military family and spouses, theory application, veterans' employment, student veterans and other educational settings, and other. The Robertson, et al. article noted only three studies related to female veterans, only one of which included a notation of "...the importance of starting the preparation process before separating from the military"

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by the Business and Professional Women's Foundation, which conducted the study in 2007 [3]. Robertson, et al. noted the dearth of research activity and important need for further research on veterans' career and life transitions.

### Results of the Integrative Literature Search

The researchers developed an annotated bibliography by comparing and analyzing the two bibliographies and the results of academic library and Google Scholar searches. The initial comprehensive research list included empirical studies, book chapters, case studies, and government publications. The list was then refined to include only research studies and government documents related to veterans and career transition. Table 1 presents a comparison of the results of this integrative literature review.

Table 1

*Comparison of literature sources related to female veterans and career transitions<sup>a</sup>*

	Buzzetta, et al. 2014 Bibliography (career related indicated in parentheses)	Buzzetta, et al. 2016 Bibliography (career related indicated in parentheses)	Academic Library and Google Scholar Results (on Buzzetta, et al. bibliographies indicated in parentheses)
• Female Veterans	3	9 (2)	11 (2)
• Veterans with Disabilities	6	11 (4)	2 (1)
• LGB (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual) Military Veterans	1	2 (1)	
• Ex-Offender Veterans		1	
• Minority Veterans		1	
• Military Family/Spouses	9	12	1
• Theory: Application & Case Studies	5 (4)	7 (4)	3 (1)
• Veterans' Employment	7 (3)	11 (8)	20 (2)
• Student Veterans and Other Educational Settings	41	49	1
• Intersection of Career and Mental Health		2 (1)	
• Assessments		1	
• Other	17 (7)	31 (14)	9 (6)
• Additional NCDA Publications & Career Convergence Articles	13 (7)	23 (12)	7 (7)
• Related Books and Articles	3	4 (1)	
<b>Total</b>	<b>105 (21)</b>	<b>164 (47)</b>	<b>54</b>

<sup>a</sup>Twenty-one (21) additional career transition related articles were identified in the Buzzetta, et al. June 2016 updated bibliography that could not be obtained through traditional academic databases and Google Scholar.

The number of publications increased by 56% from 105 publications in 2014 to 164 in 2016. Unfortunately, though research about the female veterans' population was noted in the original Robertson, et al. article [4], and the number of publications tripled between 2014 and 2016, the amount of research into this underserved population remains alarmingly high. Only 5% of the research included in the 2016 Buzzetta et al. [3] bibliography is dedicated to female veterans, while 20% of the articles uncovered in the integrative literature review utilizing academic databases and Google Scholar addressed this underserved population.

### Conclusions and Implications

It is clear that there is a gap in current research as it pertains not only to female veterans, but also to female veterans in their career transition from the military to civilian sector. This initial foray into an integrative literature review is but the tip of the iceberg. Next steps will include a comprehensive



review and analysis of the 54 articles listed in Table 1 and the 21 articles listed in the Buzzetta et al. bibliography (2016) which were unattainable at the time of writing this article. The researchers will attempt to identify themes in the 75 articles, which will then be compared to the dissertation work of Dr. Juan M. González [5], which resulted in the *Veterans' Self-Identity Development Theory* and the *Schlossberg 4-S Model* [6].

Future researchers could consider studies employing quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methodologies to take a deep dive into the phenomenon of the female veteran and examine the variables related to successful military to civilian career transitions. Practitioners, such as Transition Assistance Program administrators and human resource directors, could benefit in knowing the types of training, counseling, and mentoring, which are currently lacking for female veterans with the skills, experience, and education to be fully successful in a second career. Policymakers could benefit from the knowledge of whether the gaps in service to female veterans is reflective of discriminatory practices and put in place policy to prevent it in the future and action plans to increase female veteran representation in the workplace. Finally, female veterans could benefit from a more active investigation of the barriers to successful career transition, which could impact their impact to function positively in the emotional, family and social realms.

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