



Characteristics of Rural Veterans: 2010

Data from the American Community Survey

Prepared by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics

July 2012

Data Source and Methods

- Data for this analysis come from the 2010 American Community Survey (ACS) using American FactFinder detailed tables.
 - The ACS is an ongoing survey that provides annual data on the social and economic characteristics of the U.S. population.
 - The ACS uses a series of monthly samples to produce annually updated data for the same small areas (census tracts and block groups) formerly surveyed via the decennial census long-form sample.
- The universe for this analysis is the civilian population 18 years and older living in the United States, unless otherwise specified.
 - This universe includes a weighted estimate of 21.8 million Veterans, of which 1.5 million were women.
- All comparative statements have undergone statistical testing and are significant at the 90-percent confidence level.



Notes About Rural and Urban Definitions

- The U.S. Census Bureau defines “urban” and “rural” in the following way:
 - **Urban:** consists of two different sizes of urban areas
 - (1) Urbanized Areas (UAs) of 50,000 or more people,
 - (2) Urban Clusters (UCs) of at least 2,500 and less than 50,000 people.
 - 2010 ACS data from American FactFinder combines UAs and UCs to define “urban”
 - **Rural:** encompasses all population, housing, and territory not included within an urban area.



Background

About Rural Communities

Rural and urban communities differ in three main ways:

1. Demographic composition- in general, rural communities have less demographic diversity, especially racial and ethnic diversity, than urban areas.
2. Social ties and social capital- individuals in rural and urban communities have a similar amount of social ties, but rural residents are more likely to have strong ties (close connections with friends and family) than weak ties (loose connections with a variety of people).
3. Infrastructure and institutional support- Residents of rural communities do not have easy access to infrastructure within their daily living—such as public transportation, health care, government agencies, as well as recreational and entertainment outlets.

Source: Hofferth, Sandra L. and John Iceland. 1998. "Social Capital in Rural and Urban Communities." *Rural Sociology* 63(4): 574-598



About the Veteran Community

- Veterans are a unique subset of the U.S. population that differ from those who have never served in the military.
- In order to serve in the military, individuals must meet certain requirements which make Veterans a selective population based on certain characteristics such as education, physical fitness level, health, and criminal history.
- When making comparisons of Veteran and non-Veteran populations, it is necessary to recognize differences in gender, age, and racial/ethnic composition as a product of historical cohorts, social policies, and selection standards.
 - **The Veteran population is overwhelmingly male in comparison to the non-Veteran population.**
 - **Veterans, as a group, are much older than non-Veterans.**



Why Rural Veterans?

- The Department of Veterans Affairs has identified rural Veterans as a current population of interest.
- Just under 30 percent of the Veteran population today resides in rural areas.
- Rural Veterans represent 41 percent of the total enrolled Veteran population in VA health care system. Around 30 percent of those enrolled rural Veterans served in Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) and Operation New Dawn.

Source: The Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Rural Health uses the U.S. Census Bureau definition of rural and urban. Office of Rural Health, "Rural Health Day Fact Sheet" (Veterans Health Administration, November 17, 2011), Accessed at: http://www.ruralhealth.va.gov/docs/ORH_FactSheet_Natl_Rural_Health_Day_Nov2011.pdf



Rural Veteran and Non-Veteran Comparisons

Veterans = 6,334,076

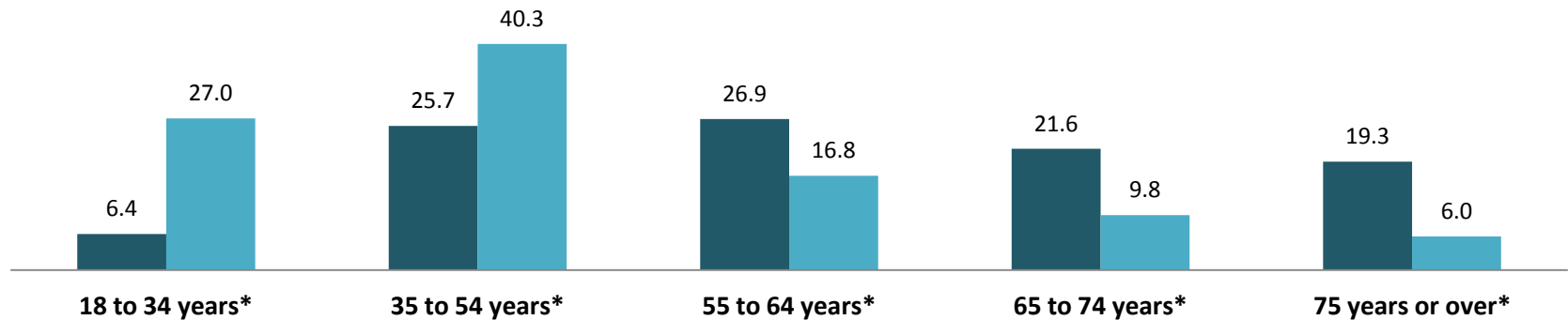
Non-Veterans = 50,359,691

Over 90 percent of Veterans living in rural communities were over the age of 35. Non-Veterans in rural communities were more highly represented in the younger age categories. The median age for rural Veterans fell within the 55 to 64 year range, while the median age for rural non-Veterans fell within the 35 to 54 year range.

Age Distribution

Population 18 Years and Older
(in percent)

■ Rural Veterans ■ Rural Non-Veterans



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2010
Prepared by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics

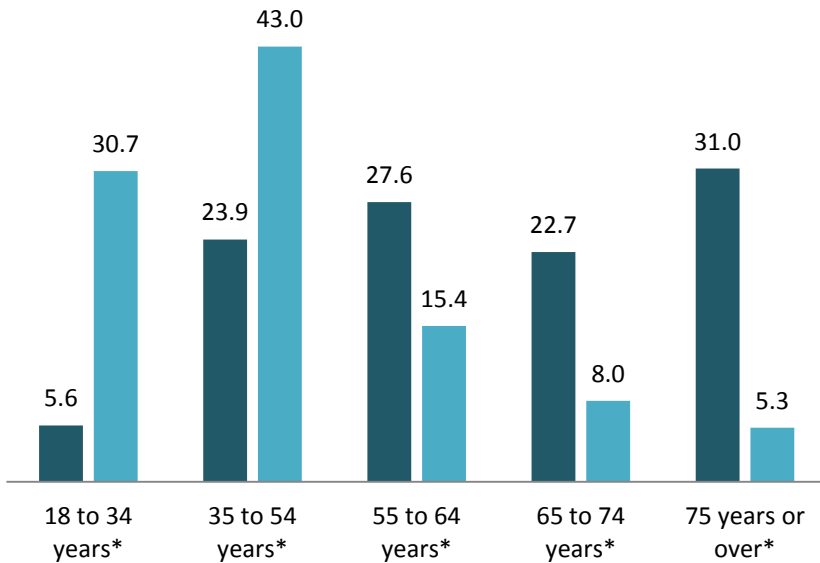
* Denotes a statistically significant difference.



The age distribution of rural Veteran men shows the high percentages of older male Veterans, due to large cohorts of World War II, Korean, and Vietnam-era Veterans. Almost 75 percent of male rural non-Veterans were under the age of 54 compared with only 30 percent of male rural Veterans. Across the age distributions, rural female Veterans were younger than rural male Veterans, close to 70 percent of rural female Veterans were under the age of 54.

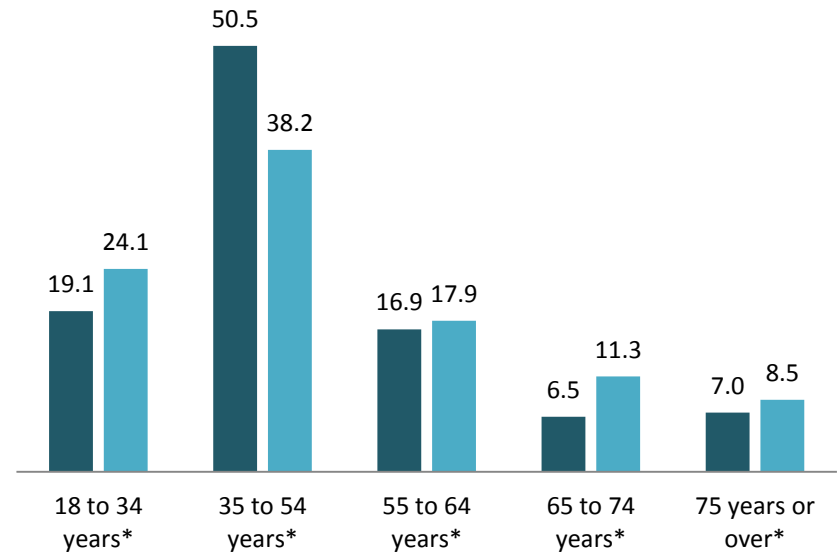
Age Distribution of Rural Men

■ Rural Veterans ■ Rural Non-Veterans



Age Distribution of Rural Women

■ Rural Veterans ■ Rural Non-Veterans



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey , 2010
 Prepared by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics

* Denotes a statistically significant difference.



Race and Ethnicity

Population 18 Years and Older

(in percent)

	Rural Veterans	Rural Non-Veterans
White*	91.0	87.2
Black*	5.7	6.6
Hispanic*	2.7	6.5
Asian*	0.5	1.8
American Indian/Alaska Native*	1.0	1.3
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander	0.1	0.1
Some other race*	0.5	1.6
Two or more races	1.3	1.4

A higher percentage of Veterans in rural communities were White compared with non-Veterans.

In rural communities, there were lower proportions of Veterans who were Black, Hispanic, and Asian compared with non-Veterans in rural communities.

In general, the Veteran population is less racially and ethnically diverse than the population of non-Veterans. In addition, rural communities tend to be less racially and ethnically diverse than urban communities in the United States.

* Denotes a statistically significant difference.

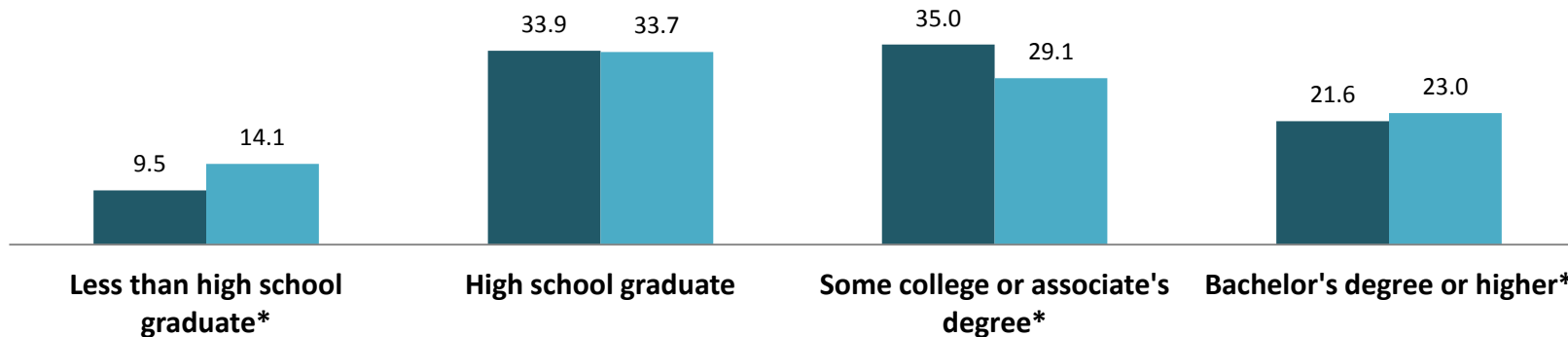
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey , 2010
Prepared by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics



Compared with rural non-Veterans, a lower percentage of rural Veterans had less than a high school degree and a higher percentage had some college or an associate's degree. Rural Veterans had a slightly lower representation of those with a bachelor's degree or higher compared with rural non-Veterans.

Educational Attainment Population 25 Years and Older (in percent)

■ Rural Veterans ■ Rural Non-Veterans



“Educational Attainment” refers to the highest level of education an individual has completed.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2010
Prepared by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics

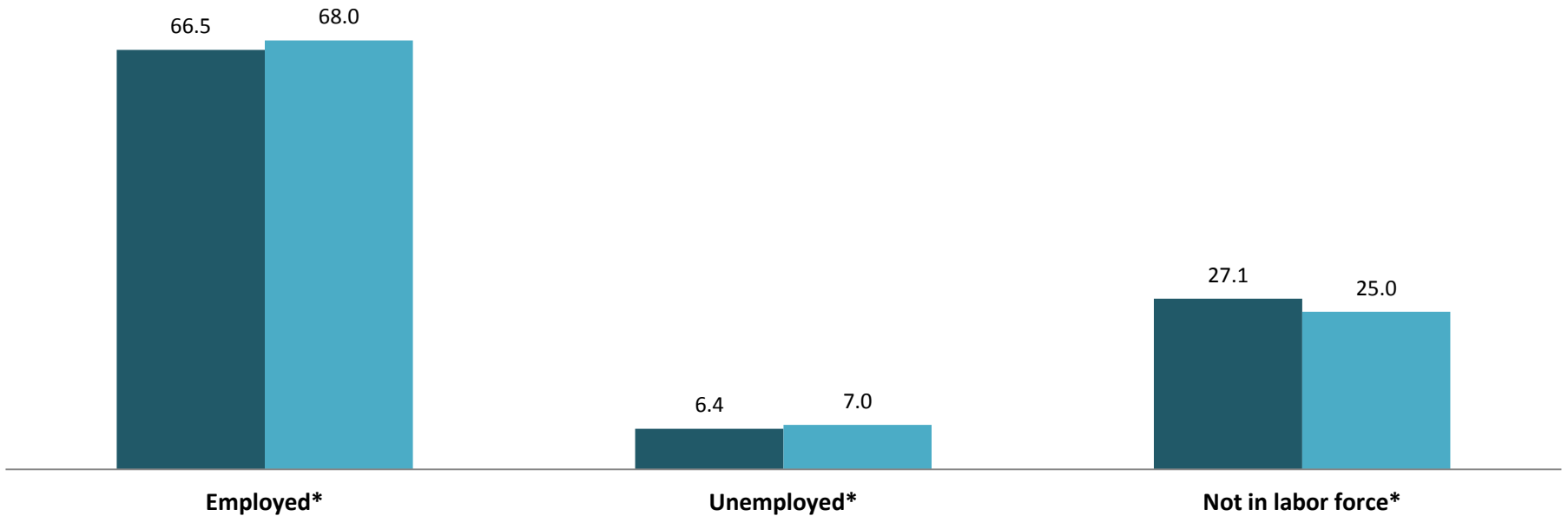
* Denotes a statistically significant difference.



A lower percentage of rural Veterans were employed and unemployed compared with rural non-Veterans. A higher percentage of rural Veterans were not in the labor force at all compared with rural non-Veterans.

Employment Status
Population 18 to 64 Years Old
(in percent)

■ Rural Veterans ■ Rural Non-Veterans



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey , 2010
Prepared by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics

* Denotes a statistically significant difference.

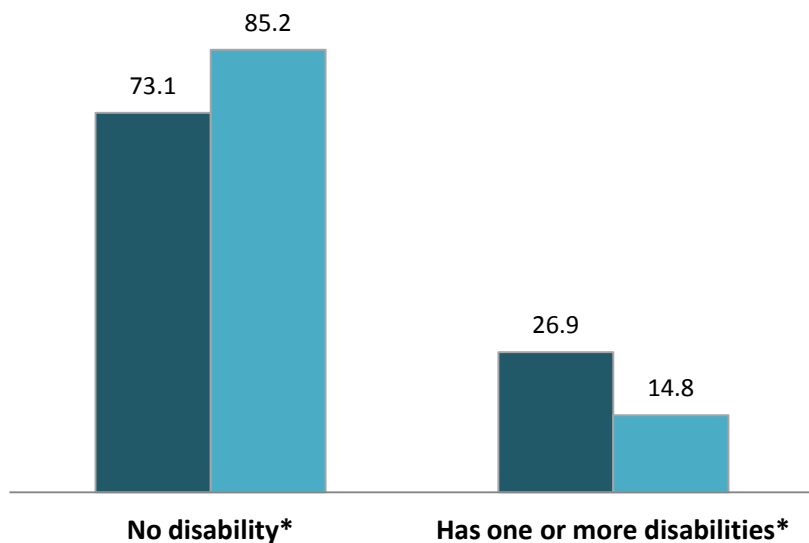


A higher percentage of Veterans in rural areas reported having at least one disability compared with non-Veterans living in rural areas. There were fewer rural Veterans living below poverty than rural non-Veterans. Only 6 percent of Veterans in rural areas were below the poverty line, compared with almost 12 percent of rural non-Veterans.

Disability Status

(in percent)

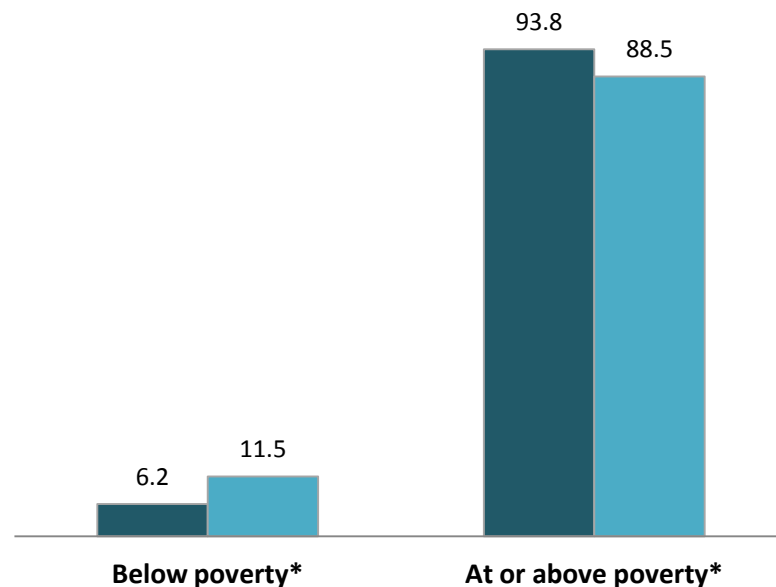
■ Rural Veterans ■ Rural Non-Veterans



Poverty Status

(in percent)

■ Rural Veterans ■ Rural Non-Veterans



The universe for each chart is the population 18 years and over for whom poverty status can be determined. Poverty status cannot be determined for individuals living in institutional group quarters (i.e., prisons or nursing homes), college dormitories, military barracks, and non-conventional housing situations.

* Denotes a statistically significant difference.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2010
 Prepared by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics



Rural Veteran and Urban Veteran Comparisons

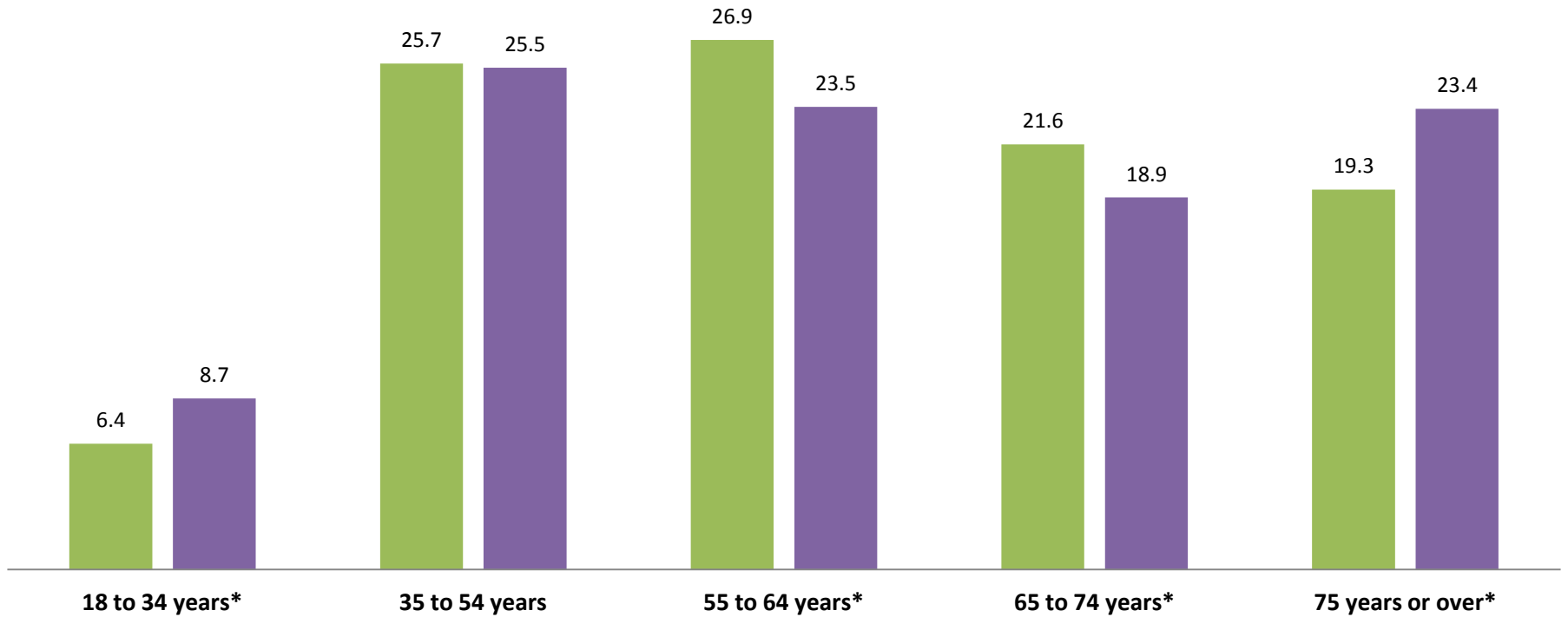
Rural Veterans = 6,334,076

Urban Veterans= 15,464,001

Rural communities had a higher percentage of Veterans in the age range of 55 to 74. Urban communities had a higher percentage of young Veterans (age 18 to 34) and elderly Veterans (75 and over) compared with rural Veterans. The median age for both rural and urban Veterans fell within the 55 to 64 year range.

Age Distribution
Population 18 Years and Older
(in percent)

■ Rural Veterans ■ Urban Veterans



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2010
Prepared by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics

* Denotes a statistically significant difference.

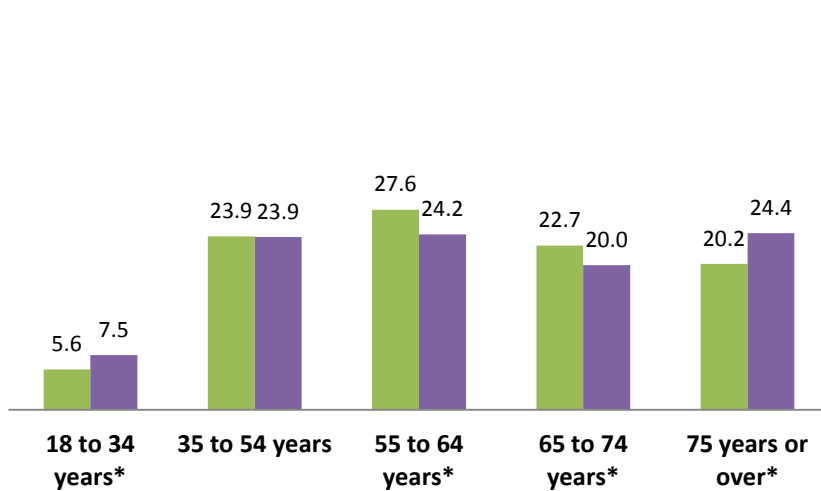


The age distribution of male rural and urban Veterans mirrors the overall age distribution, since men make up the majority of the Veteran population. Female Veterans are generally younger in comparison to male Veterans, and 50 percent of rural female Veterans were between the ages of 35 and 54. Almost 20 percent of female Veterans in rural communities were young Veterans (between the ages of 18 and 34).

Age Distribution of Male Veterans

Population 18 Years and Older
(in percent)

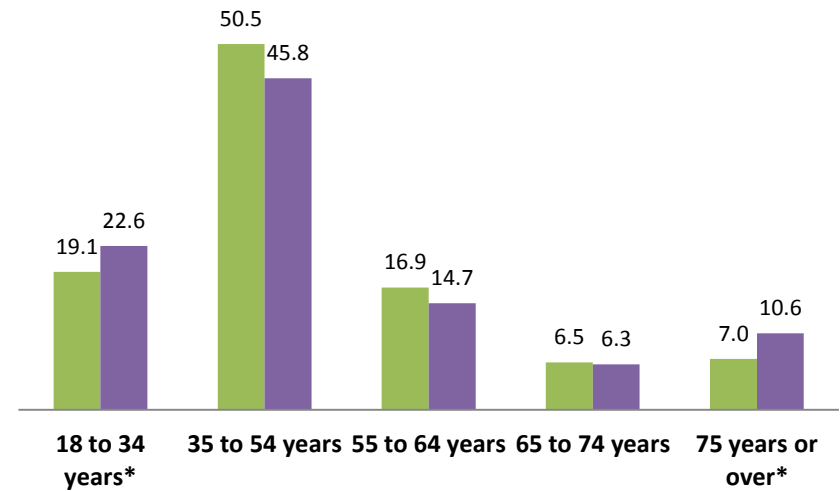
■ Rural Veterans ■ Urban Veterans



Age Distribution of Female Veterans

Population 18 Years and Older
(in percent)

■ Rural Veterans ■ Urban Veterans



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey , 2010
Prepared by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics

* Denotes a statistically significant difference.



Race and Ethnicity
 Population 18 Years and Older
 (in percent)

	Rural Veterans	Urban Veterans
White*	91.0	81.6
Black*	5.7	13.2
Hispanic*	2.7	6.4
Asian*	0.5	1.5
American Indian/Alaska Native*	1.0	0.6
Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander	0.1	0.2
Some other race*	0.5	1.4
Two or more races*	1.3	1.6

Rural Veterans were more white and less racially diverse than urban Veterans. This is not surprising considering that both rural areas and the Veteran population overall are generally less racially diverse.

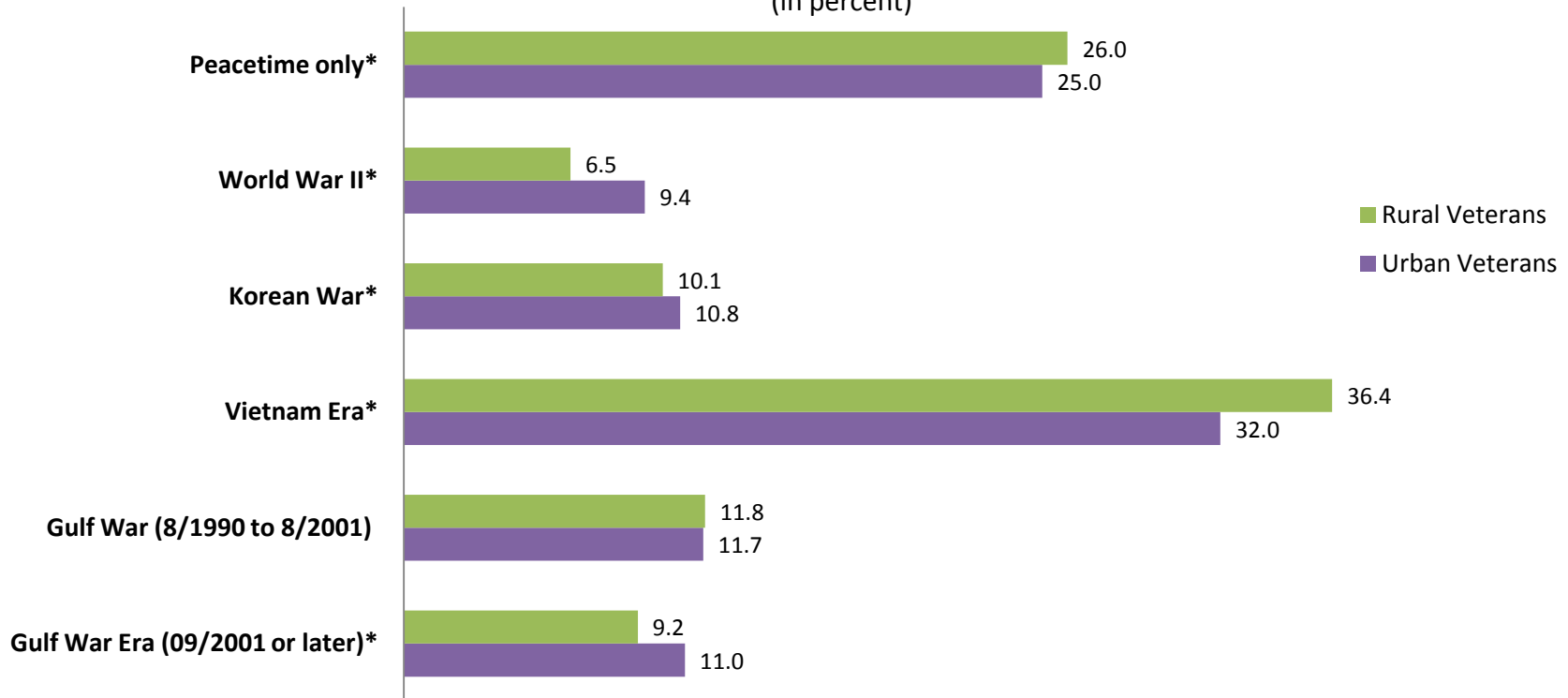
* Denotes a statistically significant difference.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey , 2010
 Prepared by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics



The most striking difference in period of service for rural and urban Veterans was the Vietnam Era. A higher percentage of Veterans living in rural communities were from the Vietnam Era compared with urban Veterans. A greater percentage of Veterans living in urban areas were from World War II, the Korean War, or the Gulf War (Post-9/11) era than Veterans in rural areas. These period of service differences reflect some of the age distribution differences between rural and urban Veterans.

Period of Service
Population 18 Years and Over
(in percent)



Note: Periods of service are not mutually exclusive. Veterans can serve in more than one period.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey , 2010
Prepared by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics

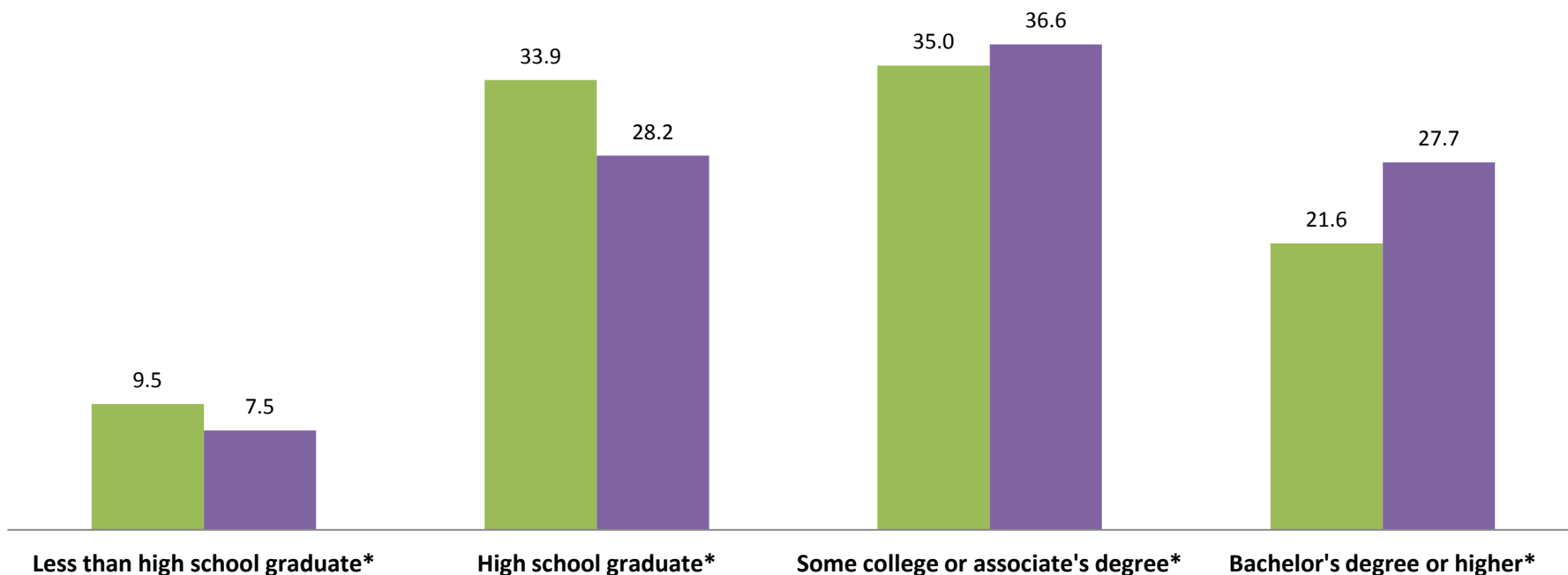
* Denotes a statistically significant difference.



Rural Veterans had higher concentrations in the lower-level education categories (less than high school degree, and high school degree), while urban Veterans had higher concentrations in the higher-level education categories (some college, and bachelor's degree or higher).

Educational Attainment Population 25 Years and Older (in percent)

■ Rural Veterans ■ Urban Veterans



“Educational Attainment” refers to the highest level of education an individual has completed.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2010
Prepared by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics

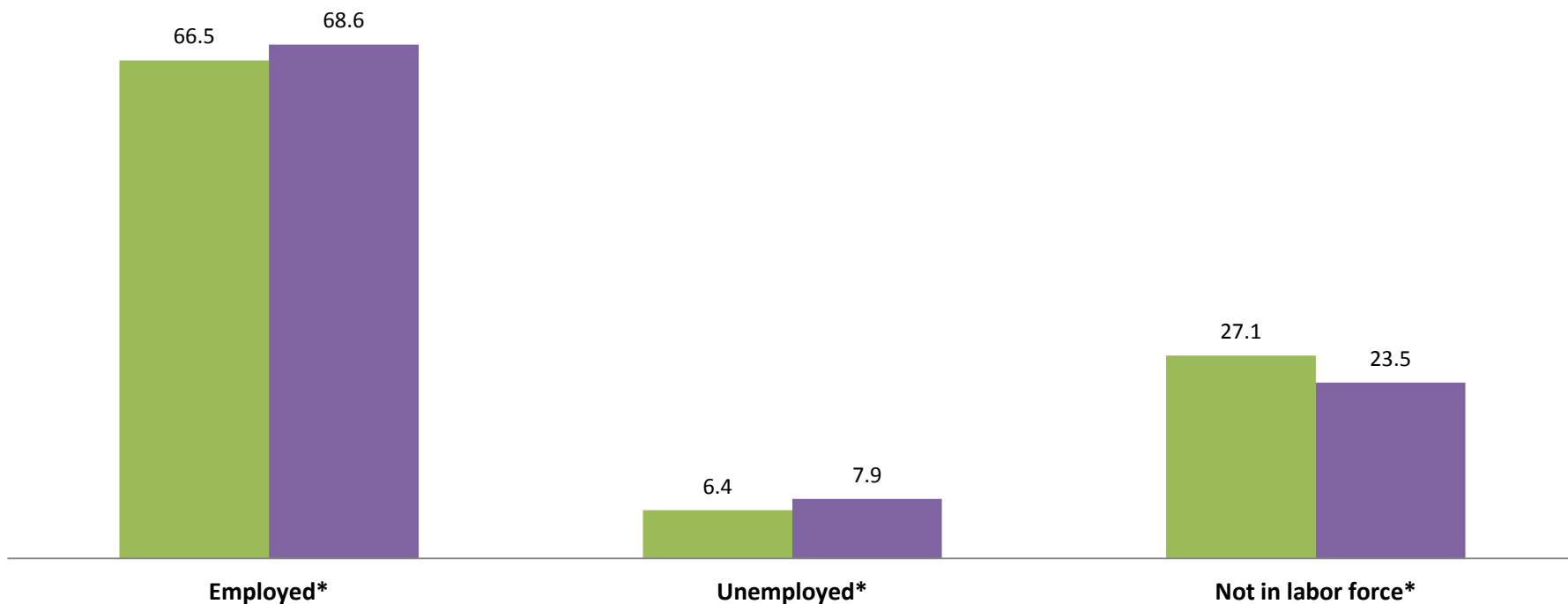
* Denotes a statistically significant difference.



A lower percentage of Veterans in rural areas were employed and a lower percentage were unemployed compared with urban Veterans. Rural Veterans had a higher percentage who were not in the labor force—this is likely a reflection of the older adult population in rural areas.

Employment Status
Population 18 to 64 Years Old
(in percent)

■ Rural Veterans ■ Urban Veterans



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey , 2010
Prepared by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics

* Denotes a statistically significant difference.

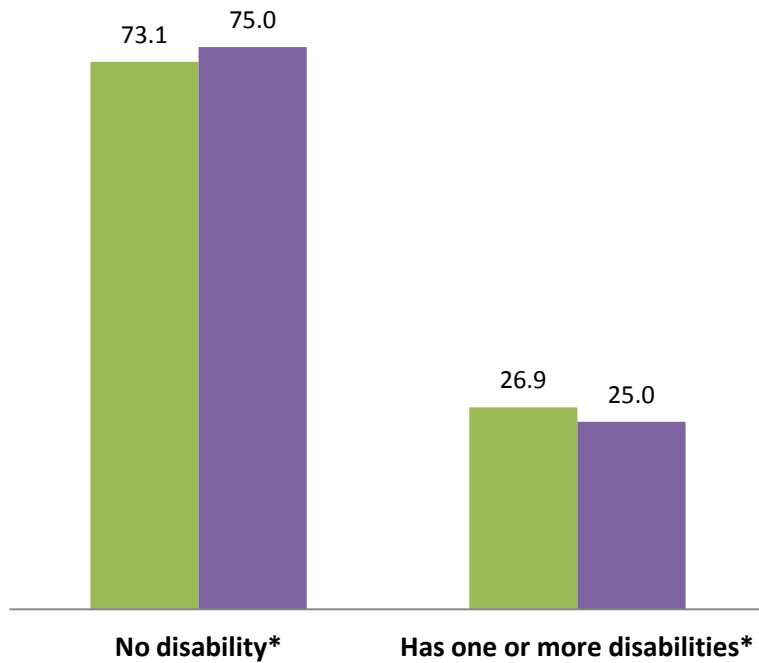


A higher percentage of Veterans in rural areas reported having at least one disability compared with Veterans in urban areas. More Veterans living in urban areas were living below poverty compared with rural Veterans.

Disability Status

(in percent)

■ Rural Veterans ■ Urban Veterans



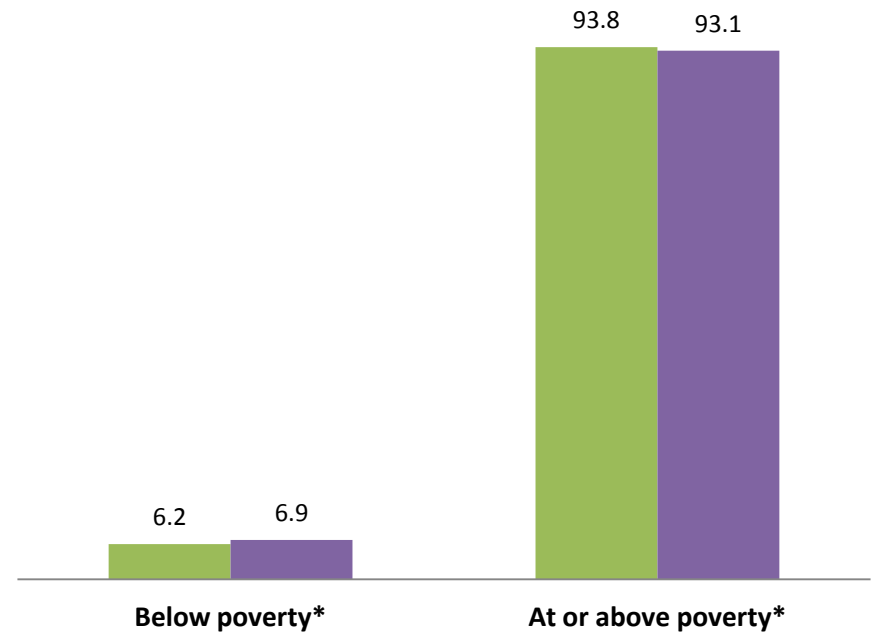
* Denotes a statistically significant difference.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2010
Prepared by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics

Poverty Status

(in percent)

■ Rural Veterans ■ Urban Veterans



Poverty status cannot be determined for individuals living in institutional group quarters (i.e., prisons or nursing homes), college dormitories, military barracks, and non-conventional housing situations.

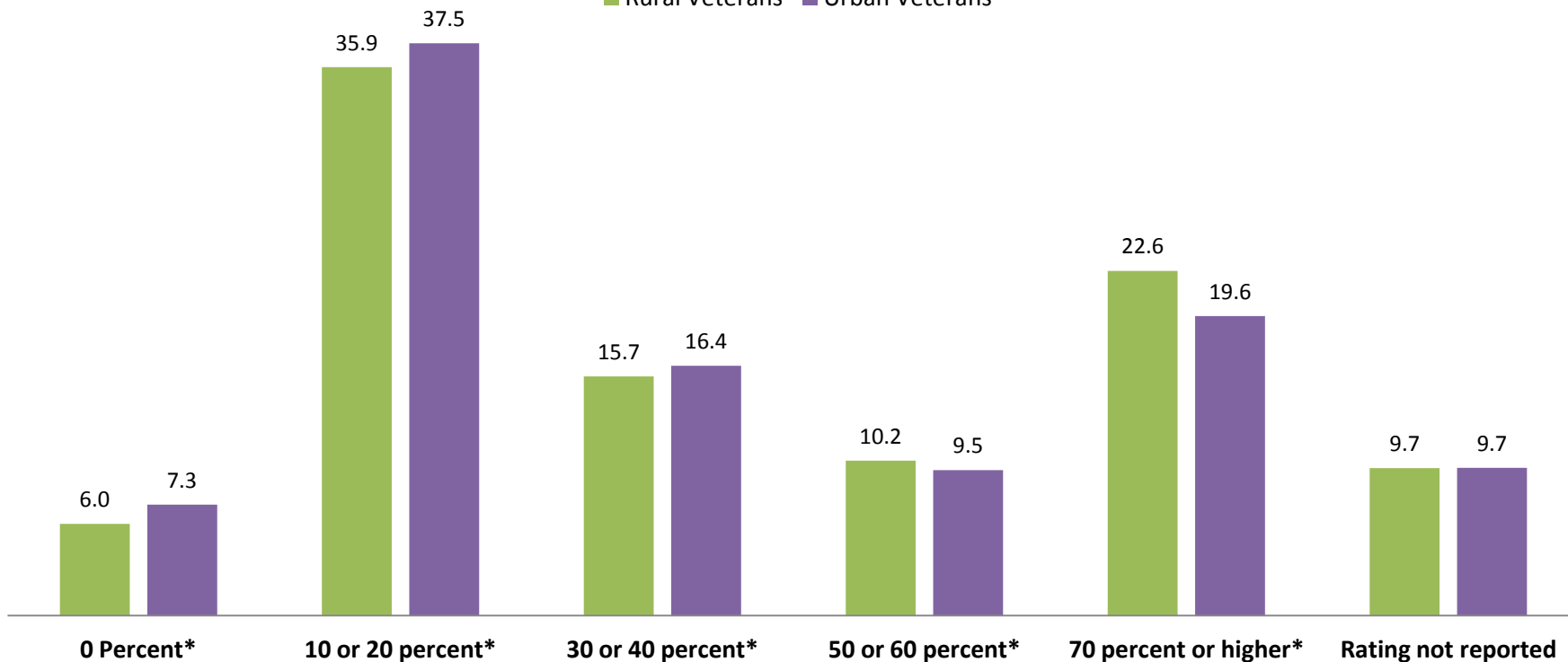


A slightly higher percentage of Veterans residing in rural areas had a service-connected disability rating greater than 50 percent compared with urban Veterans. In contrast, urban Veterans had a slightly higher representation in the 0 to 40 percent service-connected disability ratings compared with rural Veterans.

Service-Connected Disability Rating Distribution

Population 18 Years and Older
(in percent)

■ Rural Veterans ■ Urban Veterans



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey , 2010
Prepared by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics

* Denotes a statistically significant difference.



Summary

The geographic isolation of rural areas creates different circumstances and challenges for people who live in these communities. Rural communities differ from urban communities in four distinct ways: demographic composition, social ties and social capital, culture, as well as infrastructure and institutional support.

Compared with rural non-Veterans, rural Veterans were slightly older, more white and less racially diverse, less educated (bachelor's degree and above), more disabled, and less in poverty. A higher percentage of rural Veterans were out of the labor force compared with rural non-Veterans. The overall age difference between Veterans and non-Veterans likely accounts for many of the observed differences.

Compared with urban Veterans, rural Veterans were more white and less racially diverse, less educated, more disabled, and less in poverty. Rural Veterans had higher representations in the age range of 55 to 74, and a greater percentage served during the Vietnam Era or peacetime compared with urban Veterans. A slightly higher percentage of rural Veterans had service-connected disability ratings above 50 percent compared with urban Veterans; age is likely a main explanatory factor.



Implications for the Department of Veterans Affairs

Understanding the greater context of life in rural and urban areas can help the Department of Veterans Affairs assess the current needs of the population it serves and anticipate future needs. The geographic distribution of education and employment among Veterans in urban and rural areas may be one way to identify patterns of need within service areas. Other factors that should be taken into account for VA health care demand projections include: demographic characteristics, living arrangements, socioeconomic status, and migration patterns of the Veteran population.

Current demographic changes in the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) may affect the composition of the rural Veteran population in the long-term. The oldest Veterans in the current Veteran population are from a draft-era military—one that was overwhelmingly male and Caucasian. The AVF is a self-selecting population that has a different demographic and socioeconomic composition than the draft-era military. These demographic changes in the military population since the advent of the AVF in 1973 will have an impact on the overall Veteran population that the Department of Veterans Affairs will serve.



Contact Information For This Report

Sidra Montgomery

Department of Veterans Affairs

Office of Policy and Planning

National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics

For general inquiries, please contact us at

VANCVAS@va.gov.