

Justification of the Analysis of the Dynamics of Unemployment Among Young (20-24) Veterans

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) requests OMB review and approval of the Analysis of the Dynamics of Unemployment Among Young (20-24) Veterans. This Supporting Statement provides justification and information for a one-time quick response survey (three-month field period) of 2,000 discharged veterans aged 20 to 24 years. The survey instrument will be comprised of questions created and tested by the Current Population Survey. The data will provide a snapshot of the immediate needs and experiences of young American veterans, particularly the men and women returning from Afghanistan and Iraq.

Currently, Abt Associates is working with the Department of Veterans Affairs on a study of employment of recently discharged veterans. While that employment project includes some veterans aged 20-to-24, it does not focus on that age cohort. A preliminary review of data from the CPS suggests that veterans in this cohort are challenged in their ability to move rapidly into employment—at least as compared with older age cohorts, such as individuals aged 25-to-30 years. Given this information, the VA has chosen to focus this proposed effort on 20-to-24-year-old veterans to better understand their employment needs and issues. The proposed research focuses on designing and administering a quick response survey to approximately 2,000 separated veterans aged 20-to-24 years.

If an expedited review is obtained, data collection will begin eight weeks after OMB approval; otherwise, data collection will begin in May 2007.

Section A. Justification

A.1. Circumstances That Make Information Collection Necessary

Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom have heightened the interest and desire of the country, the Congress, and Federal agencies to ensure the successful transition of service men and women into civilian employment after their separation from military service. Moreover, these military operations have greatly increased the numbers of men and women serving in the US armed services. In some cases, service personnel left employment, education, or training opportunities to fulfill their active duty requirements. Transitioning back into employment, education, and/or training after completing military service can be challenging for some military personnel and may be different for different veteran cohorts and types in particular, young veterans aged 20-24. This transition—for all veterans—is a key issue for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and other federal agencies providing services to veterans. In order to improve and enhance employment opportunities for veterans, it is vital for the VA to better understand and improve service impact. The Office of Policy plans to use the results of this quick response survey to better understand the challenges faced by young veterans in particular.

The 20-minute questionnaire will be composed of survey items largely from existing National surveys, such as the Current Population Survey (CPS) or its Veteran Supplement, National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), National Survey of Veterans (NSV), and the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP). Items will be tailored, as needed, for this survey. The questionnaire will be composed of items that would be pertinent to this cohort, including questions about demographics, income, employment, work seeking, military service, reasons for not working, disability ratings, educational achievement, and assistance programs used. It is important to emphasize here that the questionnaire is comprised of validated items from the aforementioned surveys with few, if any, revisions.

A.2. Purposes and Use of Information

A diverse group of agencies are involved in the administration of veteran transition, training and education, vocational rehabilitation, and employment services within Federal and state governments as well as in the not-for-profit and private sectors. It is not clear that the agencies responsible for veteran's employment-related activities collect data that can be applied to a consideration of the entire life cycle of veteran employment. The life cycle of employment activities includes training and education, provision of transition services, rehabilitation, placement, employment, advancement, and retention.

The overall goal for the VA is to recommend, and whenever possible implement, approaches to improve employment opportunities for veterans. One step toward achieving this goal is a comprehensive analysis of the various employment-related data collected by Federal agencies and others. This effort is now underway. At this time, the Federal government is not conducting a survey that focuses on veteran employment. Existing data collection efforts, such as the Decennial Census and the Current Population Survey and Veterans Supplement, provide some limited information on veterans and their employment. However, if the VA is to provide needed services to its constituents, original data collection is required. The proposed quick response survey will inform VA employment policies and services.

Of particular interest are young (20-to-24 years) veterans of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom (September 11, 2001 to the present). Because the labor market has changed dramatically as the US has shifted to a knowledge-based and service economy, it is also important to understand the effects of this economic shift on the employment of recently discharged veterans.

A.3. Use of Improved Information Technology

Computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) will be used to administer the survey of the Dynamics of Unemployment Among Young (20-24) Veterans. Although CATI is not a new technology, it is an efficient interviewing mode that reduces respondent burden by decreasing interview administration time and improves the quality of the data collected. Moreover, CATI allows for continuous and easy monitoring of production. Also, an automated system protects against data loss and allows a seamless merge of data into datasets provided to the VA.

All Abt Associates CATI systems are extensively tested before the start of data collection. The first testing stage will be a rigorous comparison of CATI system functioning as compared with system specifications. Every response to a given question is tested against a paper questionnaire for proper functioning of skip patterns. All possible questionnaire paths are tested. CATI screens will be compared with the specifications to ensure functionality of range checks, inter-item consistency checks, help screens, error messages, and automated probes. Additional testing will include a review of the data to see that data are accurately stored within the CATI program. Sampling, scheduling, receipt control, and interview management procedures will be tested prior to data collection and are closely monitored throughout the data collection period. Once data collection begins, daily data monitoring programs check that the CATI system is functioning properly.

A.4. Efforts to Identify Duplication

The Federal government has not recently conducted a survey focusing on the employment histories of young (20-to-24 years) active duty, National Guard, and Reserve service members separated or discharged from the armed services.

A.5. Involvement of Small Entities

The information collection request does not involve any small organizations or businesses.

A.6. Consequences if Information Collected Less Frequently

This submission describes a one-time quick response (three-month field period) survey of separated veterans aged 20-to-24-years-old. The objective of the data collection is to obtain a snapshot of immediate needs and experiences of young American veterans, particularly those veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq. To achieve this objective, it is important to collect data from these veterans in the upcoming months to capture their experiences during the initial months of release from military service. This information should help the VA to more clearly understand the effects and improve the impacts of service in the armed forces on civilian employment. The Office of Policy plans to use the results of this quick response survey to better understand the challenges faced by young veterans as they return to employment in civilian life.

A.7. Special Circumstances

There are no special circumstances involved with this information collection request.

A.8. Federal Register Notice

The 60-day Federal Register notice was published on September 14, 2006, Volume 71, Number 178. A copy of this notice appears as Attachment C1. There were no comments received.

The instrument was developed by the Abt research team, comprised of Johnny Blair, Dr. Kristine Burnaska, Allison Ackermann, Judie Mopsik, and Bonnie Randall, in conjunction with VA project staff.

A.9. Payments/Gifts to Respondents

There will be no use of payments/gifts to respondents.

A.10. Assurance of Confidentiality

Abt Associates Inc., the contractor chosen by the VA for this proposed survey, is extremely conscious of the need to protect the confidentiality of data. For more than two decades, the company has conducted

numerous projects involving sensitive information; consequently, facilities and procedures have been developed to maintain this confidentiality.

All information obtained in the survey will be reported in aggregate. No individual respondent information will be reported independently or with identifying information. Small sample size cells in publicly released cross-tabulations will be suppressed to protect respondent identities. Data are filed by identification number. The VA's contractor, Abt Associates Inc., will maintain the only link between name and each respondent's unique identification number. All identifying information will be removed from analytic files and will be destroyed after the aggregate information is assembled.

All Abt Associates project staff, including data collection staff, are carefully instructed on protecting confidentiality. Such instruction is a key component of Abt Associates' project and corporate training. Instructions are based on standard procedures and on specifics dictated by Abt Associates' physical facilities. All Abt Associates' staff with access to confidential information are required to sign Affidavits of Non-Disclosure, a standard requirement for all employees and subcontractor staff who have access to confidential data. These staff will also sign Affidavits of Non-Disclosure that are required by the VA (if applicable). Violation of the signed agreement is grounds for immediate dismissal. Prior to each period of data collection, confidentiality requirements are reviewed with all staff.

Abt Associates has a DOD-approved Secret Security Clearance. In all company offices, access to data processing areas are controlled, with only authorized personnel allowed in the computer rooms and the computer tape libraries. Locked tape files and storage areas are available for use by all contracts. Access to areas where confidential data are maintained is restricted to authorized personnel. At all sites, building security forces are on duty twenty-four hours, seven days per week.

In addition to Abt Associates' protection of privacy procedures, data security encompasses backup procedures and other file management techniques to ensure that files are not inadvertently lost or damaged. All data files are routinely backed up to tape, using fast dump/restore software. Data files are backed up every evening. Weekly backups are prepared and securely stored both on- and off-site. File protection is additionally provided by in-place procedures to prevent unauthorized changes or access to data files.

Each computer platform at Abt Associates Inc. is protected by a log-in system that requires the user to produce both group and individual identification, including personal passwords. This system protects

individual files as well as general access to automated hardware and software. Individuals cannot change group affiliation; only a systems administrator can institute such modifications. This system effectively restricts computer access to authorized users. Individual data banks and files on company networks are protected by passwords and other techniques that prohibit access by staff that do not have appropriate clearances. All databases are password protected, with only data administrators having write authority over files.

Auditing programs, in place on each of the platforms, allow system administrators and project directors to monitor the identity and log-in times of all users on the system. Virus scanners are used on all DOS-based networks and PCs to protect against data loss from malicious virus attack.

A.11. Information of a Sensitive Nature

There are no questions of a sensitive nature in the survey instrument. A copy of the questionnaire appears as Attachment C2.

A.12. Estimates of Respondent Annualized Burden

The current schedule is based on data collection beginning in May 2007. If an expedited review is obtained, data collection will begin eight weeks after OMB approval.

In early April 2007, to introduce the study to potential respondents, two advance letters will be sent in one packet: one from the VA introducing the study and another letter from the Abt Associates Project Director providing details of the telephone survey as well as a 1-800-number so that potential respondents can contact us. Copies of the advance letters appear as Attachment C4.

In mid-April 2007, a pre-test of 50 respondents will be conducted. During this test, interviews are monitored to ensure that the CATI system is working as intended and to review questionnaire flow, question text, and respondent-interviewer interaction in the actual telephone interview setting. Data will also be closely monitored during the pre-test. The data will be reviewed to ensure that the CATI system is functioning as compared with system specifications and to check the data storage process.

The pre-test will include an interviewer debriefing session focusing on general interviewer impressions of the data collection process, specific concerns regarding question content or text, and respondent reaction encountered during questionnaire administration.

Data collection will begin in May 2007. An interview consists of two primary components: (1) substantive survey questions; and (2) respondent background characteristics. It is estimated that approximately 2,000 discharged veterans aged 20-to-24 years will be interviewed. Interview length is 20 minutes.

A.13. Estimate of Cost to Respondent

There is no cost to the respondent other than the time to participate. There are no capital costs associated with this information collection request.

A.14. Estimates of Cost to the Federal Government

Costs to the government include contractor time for developing the survey instrument, collecting data, preparing datafiles, and analyzing data. The total estimated cost is \$344,895.

A.15. Changes in Burden and Program Changes

No changes or adjustments have been made; this request is a new data collection.

A.16. Time Schedule and Analysis Plans

The schedule for this survey appears below.

Pre-test	April 2007
Data collection	May-July 2007
Final data file submitted	August 2007
Submission of final report	September 2007

A.16.a. Analysis Plans

The database constructed from survey data will be augmented with information from the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC). Variables from DMDC will include:

- Street Address, City, State and ZIP code
- Race
- DOB/Age
- Gender
- Military Occupation Specialty (MOS) (most recent)
- Served on Active Duty
- Years of service on active duty
- Branch of Service
- Armed Forces Qualification Test scores (AFQT)
- Date of Separation
- Officer/Enlisted
- Combat (wars and theaters)
- Rank
- Disability rating and year received

No individual respondent will be separately identified in any analyses or reports and all personal identifiers will be removed from the analysis files. Cross-tabulations of the data may result in cells containing small samples of respondents. For cross-tabulations that will be publicly released, minimum sample size cell suppression rules will be applied to ensure respondent confidentiality

A.16.a.1. Descriptive Analyses. The initial analyses will consist of basic frequency distributions on all survey items. These frequencies will provide information to enable the VA to form an overall picture of the responses and characteristics of young veterans.

For dichotomous variables, frequency distributions will be constructed, along with proportions and 95 percent confidence intervals. For non-dichotomous variables, summary statistics will be calculated, including means, standard deviations, standard errors, medians, minimums, maximums, ranges, skewness, and kurtosis, along with 95 percent confidence intervals. Grouped frequency distributions will also be produced as needed.

A.16.a.2. Cross-Tabulations. A selected subset of the numerous possible cross-tabulations of veteran characteristics (“independent” or “predictor” variables) with the survey response (“dependent”) variables will be selected and produced, based on the study’s overall research questions. Tests of association, such as Chi-Square, will take into account the sampling design for the survey and the sampling weights. Survey data analysis software like SUDAAN or STATA provide appropriate tests taking into account the sampling design.

Cleaned and weighted datafiles will also be delivered to the VA about one month following the completion of survey data collection.

A.17. OMB Expiration Date Exemption

This section is not applicable. This request is not seeking any exemptions.

A.18. Exceptions to Certification Statement

The proposed data collection does not involve any exceptions to the certification statement in line 19 of OMB form 83-I.