

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

From Homelessness to Employment: Perceptions of OEF and OIF Veterans With Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

Hayes, P. J., Degeneffe, C. E., Olney, M. F., & Tucker, M. S. (2017). From homelessness to employment: Perceptions of OEF and OIF veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, 60(4), 227-238.
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SUMMARY: A significant portion of Veterans struggle with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after returning home from OEF or OIF. For some, poorly or unmanaged symptoms can lead to negative outcomes, including homelessness and unemployment. This qualitative study sought to examine the experience of 10 homeless Veterans with PTSD and the challenges they faced. Findings suggest that Veterans with PTSD still have the values and attitudes necessary for successful reintegration into the workforce.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Participants reported that symptoms associated with PTSD led to many negative encounters (i.e., legal trouble, substance use) which disrupted their family relationships and temporarily derailed their careers.
- Several participants reported that family support helped with their psychological health and motivated them to work towards continued recovery.
- Many participants described using rehabilitation counseling services to identify a career or educational goal that worked for them now, even if it was different from what their career was before their PTSD symptoms began.
- While living with PTSD was life changing for all participants, becoming employed as a civilian contributed positively to their sense of self in most cases.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide workshops to assist Service members and their partners with PTSD with maintaining family relationships
- Enhance education, activities, and curriculum related to coping behaviors and dealing with PTSD symptoms
- Offer workshops during reintegration to help families and Service members adjust to the Service member's return, especially when the deployment has included combat exposure

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend professional development courses for community providers to educate them about Service members post-deployment mental health needs, relationship support, and reintegration into civilian life
- Encourage the training of professionals to better identify returning Service members who are struggling with symptoms of PTSD
- Encourage collaboration among the many local organizations and resources currently available for Service members with PTSD

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METHODS

- Veterans were recruited from a residential Veteran-focused program in the Southwest United States.
- Veterans were considered eligible if they were an OEF/OIF Veteran with a combat zone duty assignment, they had separated from the military at least one year prior to the interview, they met the Department of Defense definition for PTSD, and they met the Veterans Affairs criteria for combat trauma exposure (defined by the experience of clinically significant symptoms).
- Each in-person interview lasted between 35 and 75 minutes and used a semi-structured interview format.

PARTICIPANTS

- Ten Veterans participated in in-depth interviews.
- The majority of participants were male (80%), and ranged in age from less than 25 years old to 40 years or older, with most (n=6) between the ages of 25 and 35 years old.
- More than half of the participants served in the Navy (60%), while 20% served in the Marines, and 20% served in the Army.
- Just over half of the participants were White (60%), while 20% were Black and 20% were Latino.

LIMITATIONS

- The study's small sample size and use of convenience sampling means the results may not generalize to the larger military population.
- An over-reliance on interview data could introduce bias, affecting the study's reliability.
- With the inclusion of only two females in the study, conclusions cannot be drawn about the experiences of female Service members given an inadequate sample size.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Recruit a larger sample using a random selection of participants
- Incorporate multiple modes of data (i.e., interview and questionnaires) to increase the study's reliability
- Sample a larger selection of female participants in order to ensure an accurate representation of their experience

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