

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Multiple
Branches

Homeless Female U.S. Veterans in a National Supported Housing Program: Comparison of Individual Characteristics and Outcomes With Male Veterans

Tsai, J., Rosenheck, R. A., & Kane, V. (2014). Homeless female U.S. veterans in a national supported housing program: Comparison of individual characteristics and outcomes with male veterans. *Psychological Services, 11*(3), 309-316. doi:10.1037/a0036323

SUMMARY: Characteristics of male and female Veterans in the Housing and Urban Development- Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program were examined with administrative data. Homeless females were younger, less likely to have substance use disorders, and more likely to have posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) compared to male homeless Veterans in this program. There were no gender differences in housing outcomes or between those who stayed in and left the program.

KEY FINDINGS:

- At baseline, homeless female Veterans were younger, more likely to have children, and to have PTSD and other psychological disorders. In addition, homeless female Veterans were less likely to report combat exposure, be retired or disabled, have lengthy histories of homelessness or incarceration, and have alcohol and drug use disorders compared to homeless male Veterans.
- For all Veterans, it took an average of 40 days to be admitted to the Housing and Urban Development; female Veterans were admitted to the program about 10 days sooner than male Veterans.
- There was substantial attrition from the program over the period of one year; only 31% of those admitted were still in the program at that time.
- Female Veterans had worse mental health scores, but lower drug use ratings over time compared to male Veterans.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide routine screenings for mental health concerns for Service members
- Offer workshops that prepare Service members and their families to encounter common issues related to housing and employment as Service members transition from Active Duty service
- Educate Service members and their spouses about how to maintain healthy habits once they leave the military

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Support programs that help Service members and their spouses improve financial well-being to help with the transition from military service
- Encourage the creation of programs that identify and support Service members and their families who are at risk of housing instability and mental health concerns
- Recommend education for service providers around the possible effects of the transition from military service on Service members' families

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METHODS

- National Veterans Affairs (VA) administrative data on Veterans referred to the Housing and Urban Development - Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program from January of 2008 to April of 2011 were analyzed.
- Self-reports in patients' medical records were used by VA mental health clinicians to gather demographic data, recent housing history, medical problems, and psychiatric diagnoses.
- Mental health symptoms and social quality of life measures were obtained at baseline and three months after admission.
- Data were analyzed by comparing male and female Veterans' individual baseline characteristics.

PARTICIPANTS

- Forty-three thousand eight hundred fifty-three Veterans (89% male) were referred to the program; however, fewer Veterans were surveyed due to rejection or attrition from the program.
- The average age of the sample was 49.4 years (SD = 12). The sample was mostly Black (48%) and White (40%).
- Fifty-four thousand had been homeless 0-1 times in the previous three years, 37% were 2-4 times, and 43% had lifetime incarceration of one year or less, 35% had no incarcerations, and 23% had more than one year.

LIMITATIONS

- Only homeless Veterans referred to the Housing and Urban Development - Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program were included in this study. Therefore, these results may not generalize to Veterans who are not homeless.
- It is not known what the high attrition rate indicates - successful housing obtained, loss of data, decompensation - and this is an essential outcome in order to address the problem of homelessness for Veterans.
- Gender was not reported at each follow-up (three, six, nine, and 12 months post-admission), so conclusions based on gender cannot be determined from data after the baseline data collection.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore the causes of the high rate of attrition from the Housing and Urban Development - Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program
- Develop gender-specific interventions for homelessness to identify the most effective models to help male and female Veterans exit homelessness
- Gather data from current Service members and their spouses to determine their needs as they prepare to transition from military service

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