



VA NATIONAL CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS AMONG VETERANS

Promoting data-driven, evidence-based solutions to end Veteran homelessness

The Relationship Between Trauma and Housing Instability Among Women Veterans

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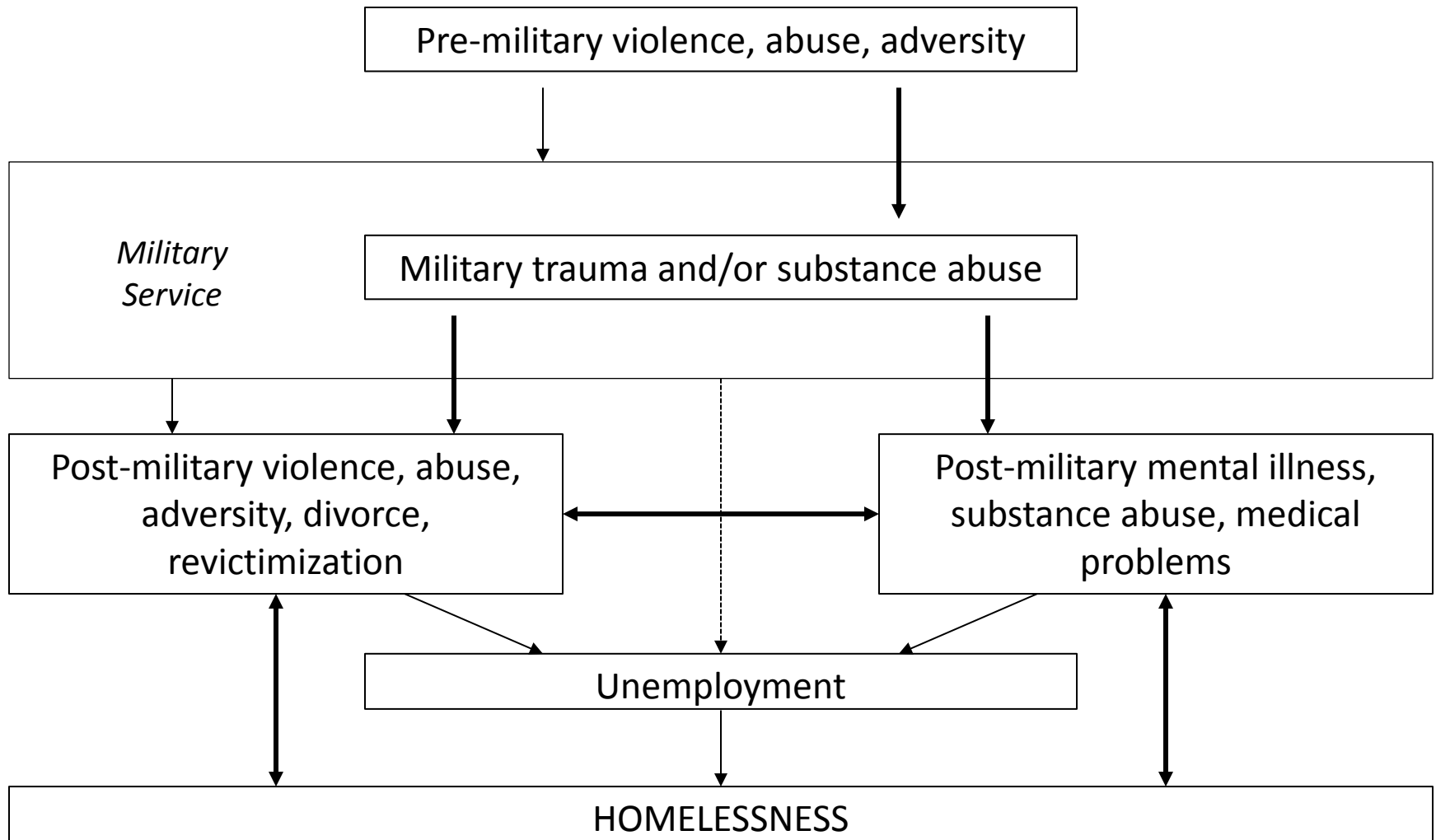
Women Veterans

- Number of women Veterans has nearly doubled in the past decade; fastest growing segment of Veteran population
- Women Veterans are 2.1–3.4 times as likely as their non-Veteran counterparts to experience homelessness
- 1–2% of all women Veterans, 13–15% of women Veterans living in poverty will experience homelessness over the course of a year
- 8.5% (3,219) of Veterans who were homeless at one point-in-time in January 2018 were female
 - 56% were sheltered
 - 44% were unsheltered

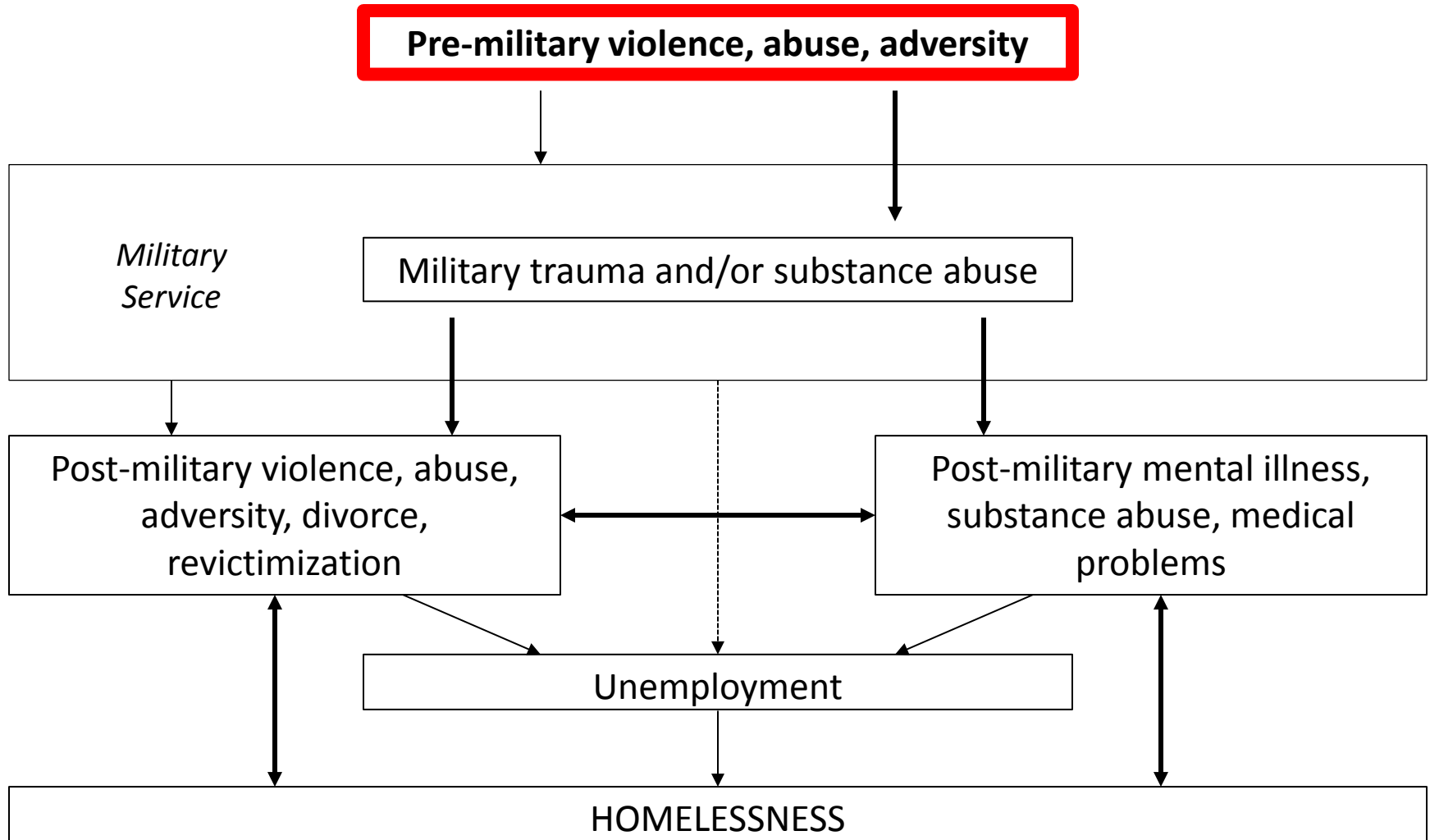
Risk Factors for Housing Instability

- Demographics
 - Younger age
 - Disability
 - Black
 - Unemployed
 - Unmarried
- Mental health and substance abuse
- Experience of trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Framework: Web of Vulnerability



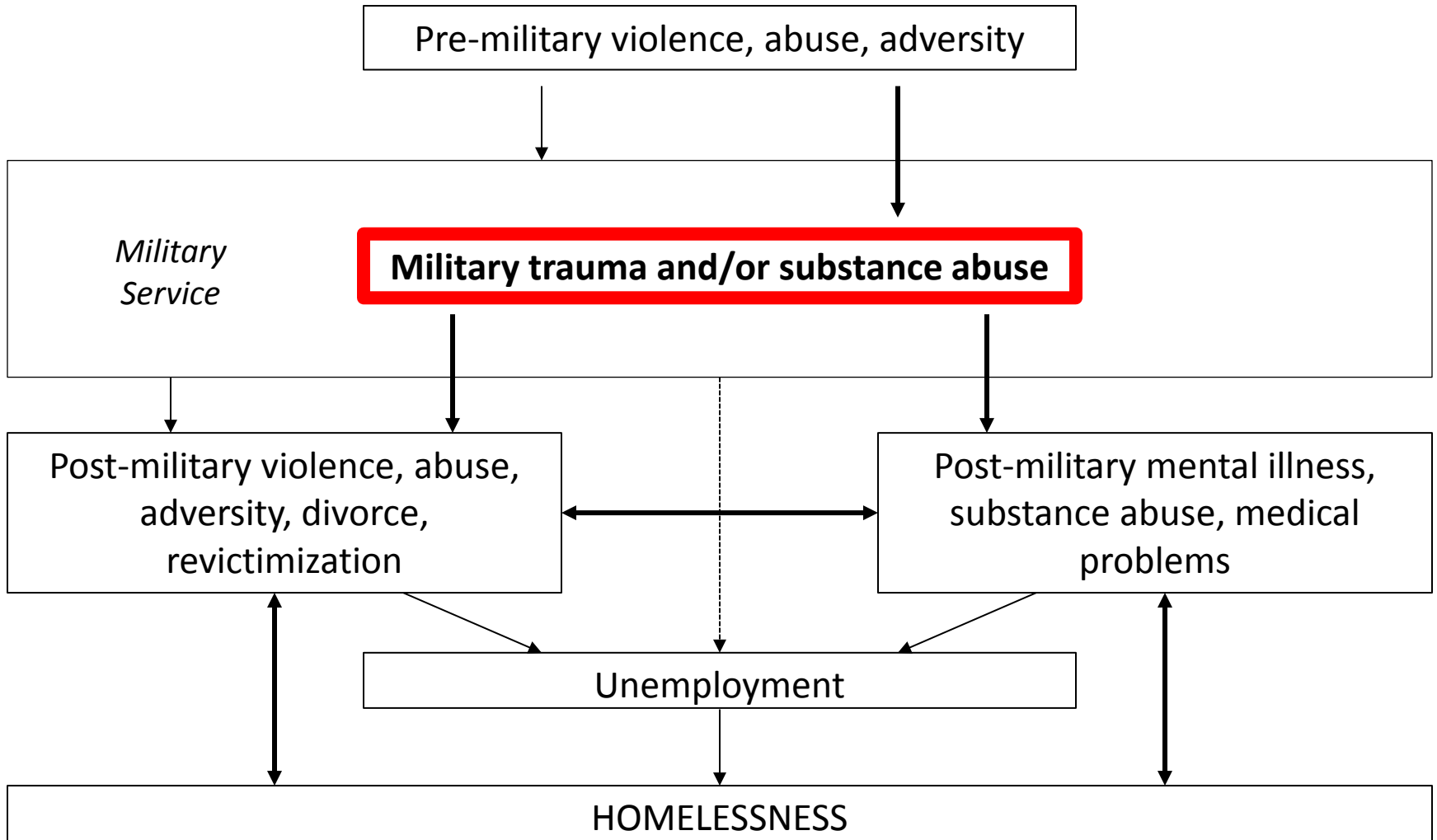
Pre-Military



Pre-Military

- Compared with their non-Veteran peers, women Veterans report higher rates of childhood maltreatment: physical, emotional, sexual abuse
 - 1/3 enlisted women have a history of childhood sexual abuse
- Women Veterans generally—and homeless women Veterans, specifically—have reported joining the military to escape family violence or other pre-military adversity

Military Service



Military Service

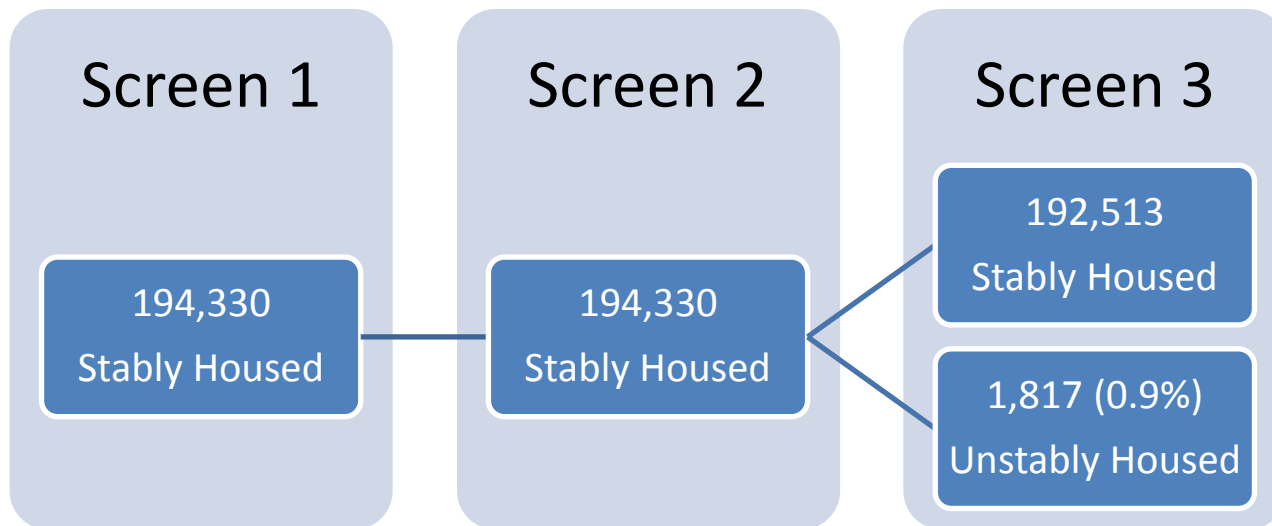
- Exposure to combat
- Military Sexual Trauma (MST): *experiences of sexual assault or repeated, threatening sexual harassment that a Veteran experienced during his/her military service*
 - 1/5 women Veterans accessing VHA healthcare has reported MST
 - MST is associated with 4-fold increase in odds of homelessness; 2/5 women Veterans experiencing homelessness have reported MST

Military Service

- Barriers to reporting MST
 - Stigma, concerns about confidentiality, secondary victimization, discouragement
- Consequences of MST increase risk of housing instability
 - Mental health conditions, PTSD
 - Substance use disorders
 - Premature discharge from the military
 - Ongoing victimization
 - Difficulty reintegrating following discharge

MST → Housing Instability

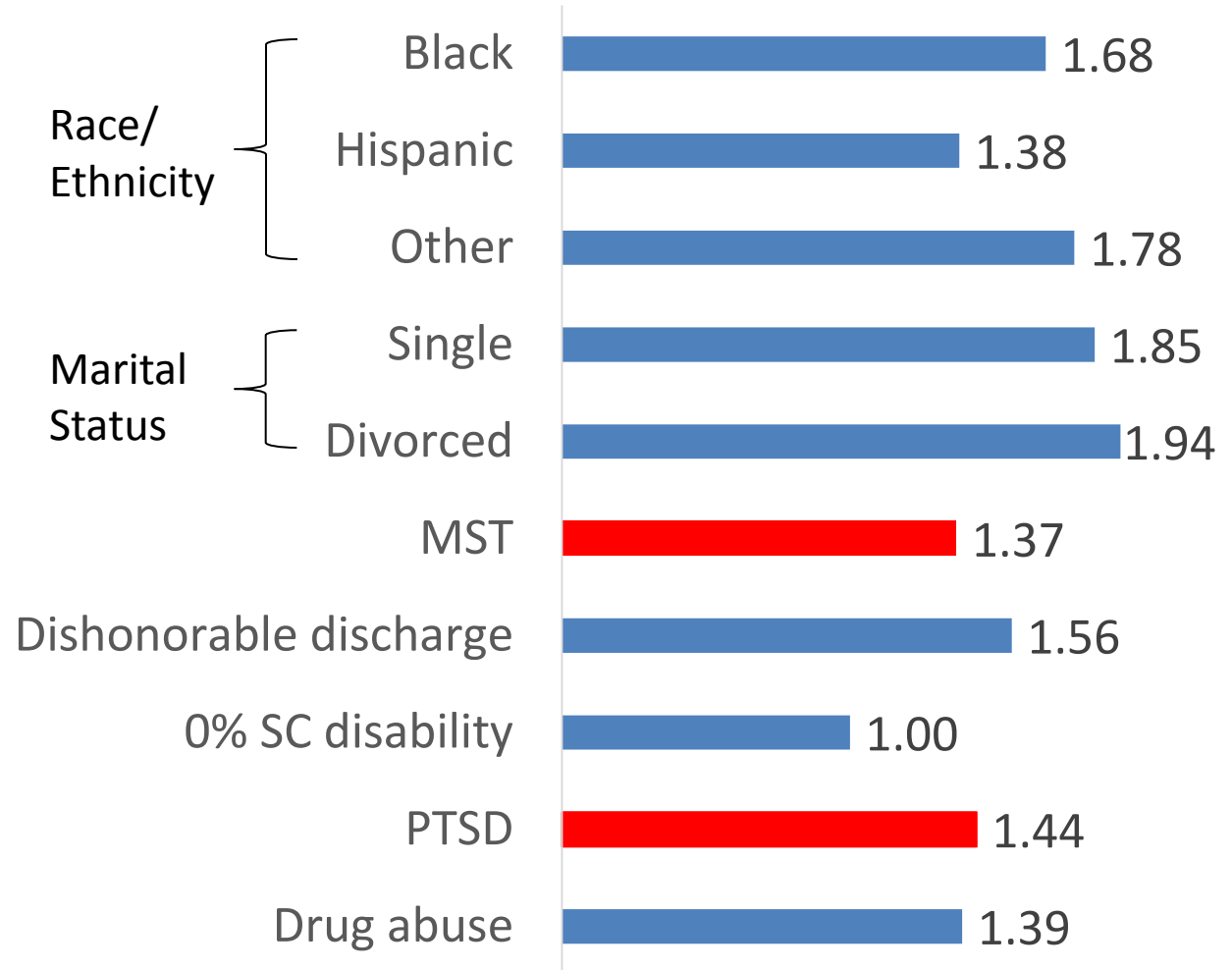
- Sample: Women Veterans accessing VHA healthcare who responded to the universal screen for housing instability at least 3 times, 2012–2016



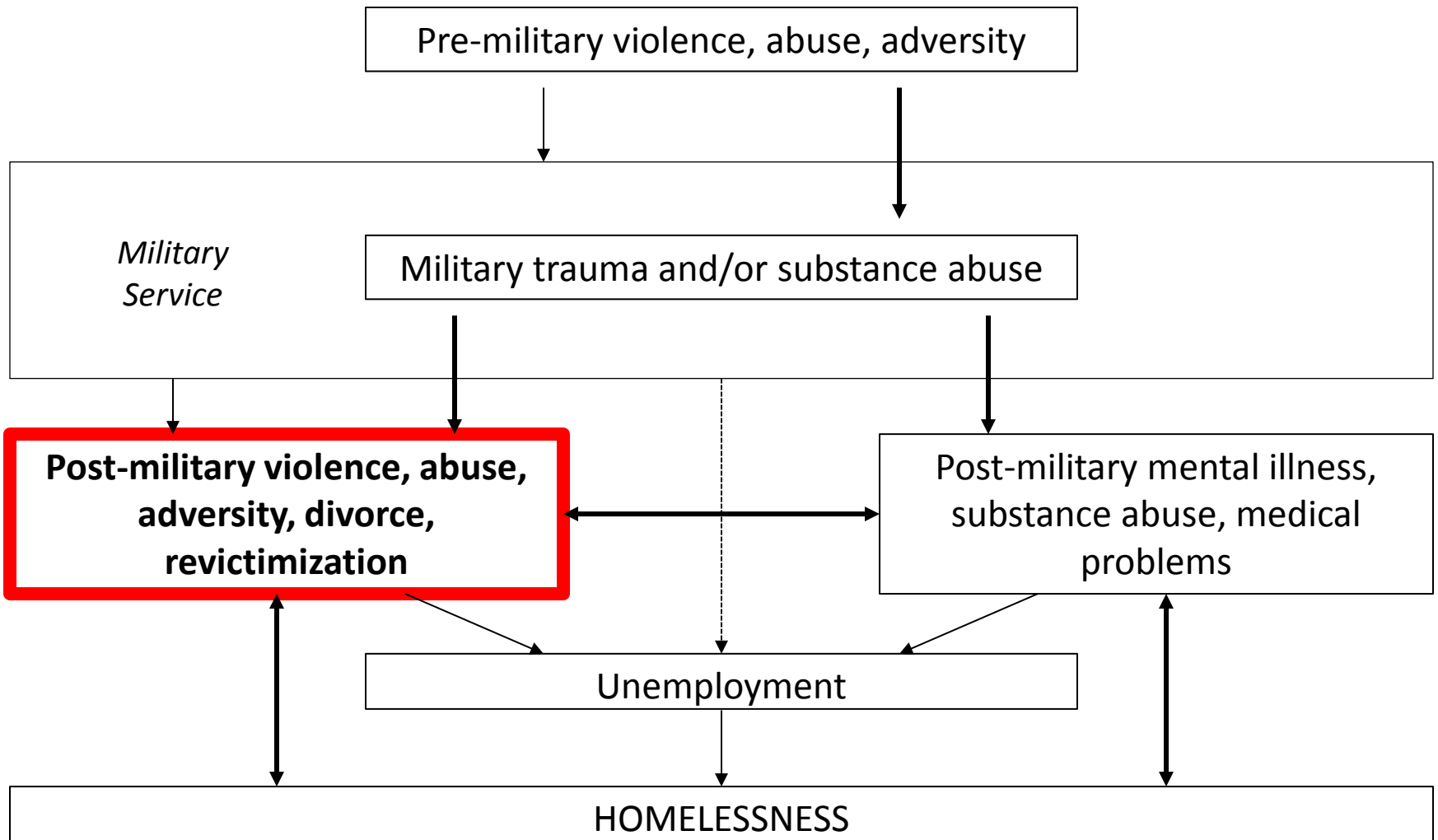
- Methods: Assessed odds of becoming unstably housed, controlling for sociodemographics, diagnoses, health services use

MST → Housing Instability

Increased odds of becoming homeless among women Veterans with indicator of MST, PTSD



Post-Military



Post-Military

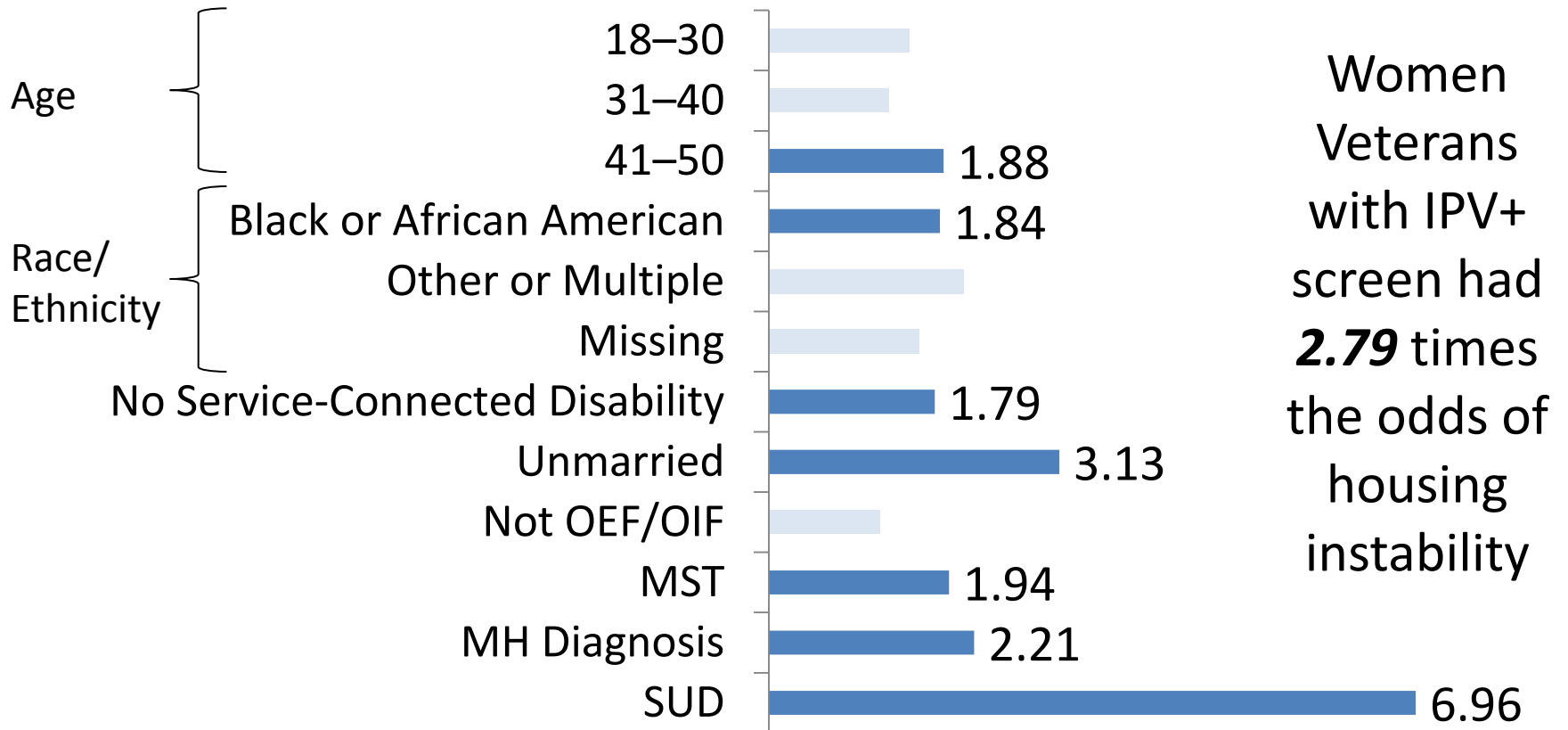
- PTSD
 - Women entering the military are often at high risk of PTSD due to early abuse and increased risk of assault while in the military
 - Sexual trauma is more influential than war trauma in the development of PTSD among women Veterans
- Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)
 - Increases the odds of homelessness by a factor of 4
 - Experienced at a greater rate among women Veterans than non-Veteran peers
 - 1/5 women Veterans report experiencing past-year IPV
 - Consequences of IPV: substance use, mental health issues, economic hardship

IPV → Housing Instability

- Sample: 8,427 women Veterans who responded to a screen for past-year IPV at 13 VA facilities, 2014–2016
- Methods
 - Assessed relationship between experiencing past-year IPV and having an indicator of housing instability, controlling for age and race
 - Assessed correlates of housing instability among women Veterans with IPV+ screen

IPV → Housing Instability

Correlates of Housing Instability Among Women Veterans with IPV+ Screen



IPV → Housing Instability

IPV can precipitate housing instability and vice versa

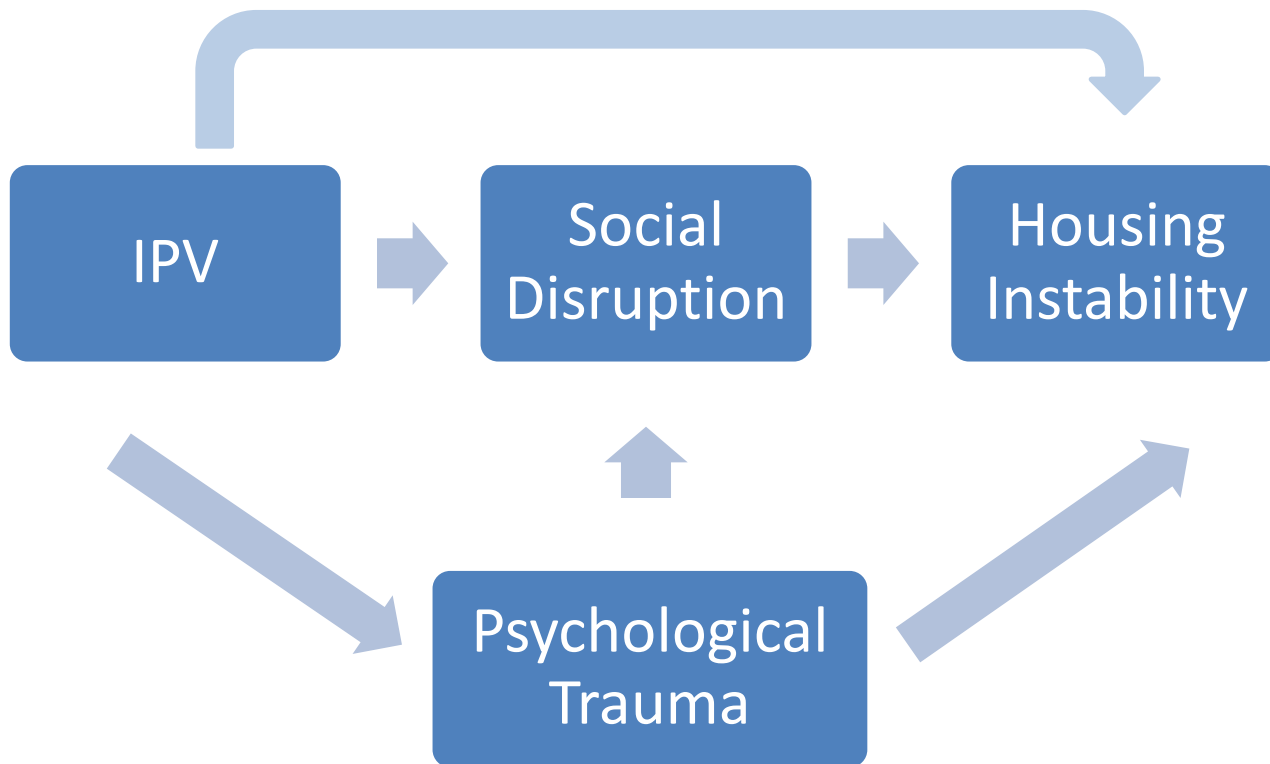
We had mutually come to the fact that we weren't going to be married any longer because he was abusive—mentally, emotionally, financially. And because I had went through so much with him, he said he just needed 30 days to leave the house...so I went to my uncle's house...just to give him the time to move out; he did the opposite. He tried to press protection from abuse orders on me. He took all my personal information and taped it to the windows and the doors, my social, my name, my height, my age, everything. I had to have multiple contacts with the police department. He changed the locks on my house...he ultimately destroyed the house to where it was I had to go to the VA [Home Loans] and have a deed in lieu because I literally couldn't even live in the house.

IPV → Housing Instability

IPV can pose a barrier to accessing housing and other support services

My issue was that while they [the housing agency] were helping me, I still had to go home to my abusive husband. It was hard for me to be able to come to these appointments. I do not work, so coming out all the time is kind of like all of a sudden “Where are you going?” What I told him I was doing was I told him I was going to anger management. Sort of I was. That is what I told him to keep him kind of cool without having to tell him...Eventually I did have to tell him and that was scary. Some days he took it well and some days it was kind of rough.

IPV → Housing Instability



Implications

- Life course adversity and material hardship accumulate to produce **severe deprivation**, the cumulative disadvantage of:
 - Acute hardship: poverty-level income, material hardship
 - Compounded hardship: experience of additional adversity
 - Persistent hardship: experience of deprivation over an extended period of time, often generations

Implications

- Services need to assess for and address experiences of trauma and housing instability **together**
- Address experience of trauma
 - Ensure access to mental healthcare, especially related to MST, PTSD
 - Carefully assess for trauma
 - Use trauma-informed models of care

References

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