



# **NATIONAL COALITION *for* HOMELESS VETERANS**

## **Effects of structured vocational services in ex-offender veterans with mental illness: 6-month follow-up**

LePage JP, Lewis AA, Washington EL, Davis B, Glasgow A. | [Full Report](#)

### Quick Takeaways

- The chances of getting hired are approximately 40 percent worse for those with a felony history than for those without and unemployment rates have been found to be 15-25 percent higher.
- Actual rates of homelessness for those released are as high as 50 percent for state prisoners released to urban areas. In dually diagnosed populations, employment, not chronic mental illness, was predictive of prolonged homelessness.
- The results demonstrate that staff-led, formatted vocational group programs with manuals can improve vocational outcomes for veterans with felonies.

### Summary

This study evaluated the effect of three methods of vocational assistance on competitive employment for veterans with felony histories over a 6 month follow-up period. These three methods were basic vocational services, self-study using a vocational manual designed for formerly incarcerated veterans, and a group led by vocational staff using the vocational manual. The current study expanded on past studies through a larger sample size and a broader definition of employment success. The researchers recruited 111 (108 male, 3 female) veterans with a history of at least one felony conviction and a mental illness and/or substance dependence/substance dependence in remission.

### Employment Outcomes

The outcome of importance was based on competitive employment. After incarceration, in any given week, 40 percent of those with a felony history and 55 percent of black males with felony histories are unemployed. The chances of getting hired are approximately 40 percent worse for those with a felony history than for those without and unemployment rates have been found to be 15-25 percent higher.

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*Definition of competitive employment: (1) not set aside for those with disabilities, (2) in a mainstream integrated setting, and (3) for at least minimum wage*

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In a survey of incarcerated individuals with mental illness, 22 percent believed they would be homeless after release, with the number increasing to 43 percent for those with mental illness and substance abuse. Actual rates of homelessness for those released are as high as 50 percent for state prisoners released to urban areas. In dually diagnosed populations, employment, not chronic mental illness, was predictive of prolonged homelessness.

### Findings

Findings indicated that the group format was associated with quicker employment and more total employment than the basic and self-study conditions. The results demonstrate that staff-led, formatted vocational group programs with manuals can improve vocational outcomes for veterans with felonies. The findings continue to demonstrate the trend that self-study programs are no better than basic vocational services in helping veterans obtain employment (*detailed discussion on this point in the report*). An evaluation of demographic, clinical, and legal variables revealed no relationship with employment.

### Conclusion

As in previous research, self-help activities were not supported and may be of limited use in their current form. The researchers mention the promise of blending self-study with staff feedback, e.g., web-based interactions, may hold promise. The results support structured standardized groups focused on obtaining employment and the researchers recommend incorporating similar programs into psychosocial treatment modalities that serve this population.