



NATIONAL COALITION *for* HOMELESS VETERANS

Employment Status of Veterans Receiving Substance Abuse Treatment from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

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Quick Takeaways

- Only 28% of veterans reported any earnings and the same percentage reported any days of paid work during the past 30 days.
- Many persons in the sample were employed throughout the study; however, substantial turnover occurred.
- Of the 2,072 veterans in the sample receiving a disability pension, 17% had any days of paid work at baseline, slightly lower than the percentage of the overall sample (28%), but still indicating labor market engagement in this population.

Summary

This study examined employment outcomes of veterans with substance use disorders and comorbid general medical and psychiatric disorders following substance abuse treatment. The researchers identified risk factors for employment in hopes to support VA and non-VA providers in identifying veterans that may be at risk for employment difficulties.

One of the tools utilized was the VA's Addiction Severity Index (ASI) that assesses persons in substance abuse treatment at intake and for six-month follow-ups. The researchers identified 16,538 in VA substance abuse treatment programs from 9/1/2001-2/10/2010 with valid ASI intake and follow-up assessments.

Findings

The sample was largely male (97%). At intake, the average age was 49 years. Only 28% of veterans reported any earnings and the same percentage also reported any days of paid work during the past 30 days. At follow-up, 1,856 (32%) and 1,981 (35%) veterans, respectively, reported any earnings and any days of paid work during the past 30 days. Of the 28% of veterans who had any days of paid work at baseline, 60% also had paid work at follow-up, which indicated that although many persons in the sample were employed throughout the study, substantial turnover occurred. At intake, 55% reported serious anxiety, 51% reported serious depression, and 3% reported attempted suicide in the past 30 days.

Veterans with comorbid anxiety and general medical conditions had lower odds of having earnings from employment or days of paid work at follow-up. Veterans with co-occurring anxiety and with co-occurring general medical problems had lower odds of having any earnings than veterans without these co-occurring disorders. Being older was associated with lower odds of having any earnings, and having more education was marginally associated with higher odds of having any earnings. Of the 2,072 veterans in the sample receiving a disability pension, 17% had any days of paid work at baseline, slightly lower than the percentage of the overall sample (28%), but still indicating labor market engagement in this population.

Conclusion

Veterans in substance abuse treatment at the VA with co-occurring anxiety and general medical conditions are particularly at risk of employment difficulties, although the effect was greater for those with general medical conditions than with anxiety. The results of this study can help providers identify areas that may not be typically included in treatment plans but that can have substantial impacts on quality of life.