



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

## **Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Employment in Veterans Participating in Veterans Health Administration Compensated Work Therapy**

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### Quick Takeaways

- Individuals with substance use diagnoses or who were homeless at program entry were more likely to be employed at discharge, while receipt of public support income and severe mental illness decreased the likelihood of being competitively employed.
- Veterans with a history of homelessness when last in the community had an increased likelihood of competitive employment at discharge.
- Veterans that served in the post-Vietnam era and had PTSD were less likely than those with PTSD who served in the Vietnam era to work competitively at discharge.

### Summary

The study examines employment outcomes in individuals with a primary diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Through various statistical models, the researchers examined the relationship between PTSD, other aspects of military service, and employment among 5,862 veterans participating in Veterans Health Administration Compensated Work Therapy (CWT).

For the report, the researchers defined severe mental illness as a diagnosis of schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, bipolar disorder, or another psychotic disorder. The diagnosis of “affective disorder” is used for all affective disorders other than bipolar disorder.

Research note: researchers excluded those who served in eras earlier than the Vietnam era because older veterans are less likely to be engaged in the competitive workforce. They restricted the sample by service era rather than by age to best examine the relationship between service era and employment.

### Participant Demographics

- Average age: 48.2
- Average length of formal schooling: 12.9 years
- Male: 94.5%
- Caucasian: 47.6%
- African American: 48.5%
- Separated, widowed or divorced: 59.2%
- Post-Vietnam era: 54.4%
- Vietnam era: 34.7%
- Persian Gulf, Gulf War I and II era: 12.9%
- PTSD diagnosis: 16%
- Substance abuse diagnosis: 82.0%
- Affective disorder: 32.3%
- Severe mental illness: 19.2%
- Homeless: 61.8%
- Received VA benefits or compensation: 19.3%
- Received Social Security benefits: 9.2%

### Findings

Veterans with PTSD were 19% less likely to be employed at discharge. Individuals who were competitively employed were more likely to be younger, worked more days for pay prior to CWT admission, earned less public support income, and had fewer medical conditions. Those competitively employed at discharge were also more likely to have served in the post-Vietnam era or the Persian Gulf era, to have served in the Persian Gulf theater of operations, and to have been homeless when last living in the community. Veterans who were working competitively at discharge were less likely to be receiving VA service-connected disability income or Social Security income and less likely to have a diagnosis of PTSD, an affective disorder, a severe mental illness, or been incarcerated.

Those who were never married were less likely to be competitively employed than those who were currently married. Veterans who served in any theater of operations were more likely to be employed. Presence of a substance abuse diagnosis or a diagnosis of an affective disorder was not significantly related to competitive employment status, although the likelihood of employment was decreased for veterans with a severe mental illness. Veterans with a history of homelessness when last in the community had an increased likelihood of competitive employment at discharge, and there was a positive relationship between the number of days competitively employed prior to admission and the likelihood of competitive employment at discharge. Veterans that served in the post-Vietnam era and had PTSD were less likely than those with PTSD who served in the Vietnam era to work competitively at discharge.

### Conclusion

Although the rate of competitive employment for individuals with PTSD was lower than for those without, the overall rate of employment at discharge was low for both groups, at 30 and 36 percent respectively. Among the other prominent factors that were associated with employment were greater education and prior work history. Factors associated with reduced employment included public support income, the number of medical conditions, and prior incarceration.