



NATIONAL COALITION *for* HOMELESS VETERANS

“Risk Factors for Homelessness Among US Veterans”

Jack Tsai and Robert A. Rosenheck/ [Link to full article](#)

Quick Takeaways:

- The risk of becoming homeless is greater for veterans than for nonveterans.
- For both veterans and nonveterans, substance use disorders and mental illness are the strongest risk factors for homelessness, followed by being low income.

Study:

Researchers conducted a systemic review of the literature on risk factors for homelessness among veterans. For inclusion in this review, studies had to meet certain criteria, including: having veterans in the sample; assessing homelessness; including homelessness as an outcome or dependent variable; and a focus on identifying risk factors or characteristics associated with homelessness. Of the 153 studies initially identified, 31 were included in this review.

These studies were divided into three levels: 1) more rigorous – generally larger sample sizes that used a cohort, case-control, or research design to evaluate a broad range of sociodemographic, psychosocial, and health measures (seven studies); 2) less rigorous – generally smaller studies focusing on subpopulations or a limited number of variables (nine studies); and 3) comparative studies of homeless veterans and homeless nonveterans (15 studies).

Findings:

Across the level 1 studies, substance abuse and mental health issues were consistently identified as major risk factors for homelessness, with substance abuse having the greatest effect. The review of level 2 studies reinforced these findings. Some of the studies suggested that these issues preceded homelessness. Some studies identified that PTSD was a risk factor, but no more so than other mental health disorders.

Being low income/poverty and related variables, including unemployment and military pay grade, were also identified as risk factors across six of the seven level 1 studies. Social isolation and weaker social support were associated with longer duration of homelessness and more chronic homelessness in three level 1 and two level 2 studies. The findings on increased risk of homelessness for OEF/OIF veterans were mixed.

All of the level 3 studies found a greater risk of homelessness for veterans than for their nonveteran counterparts. In several of these studies, specific subsets of veterans, including women and post-Vietnam era men, were at particular risk.

Conclusion:

Research has identified a number of risk factors for veteran homelessness, including substance abuse, mental health issues, poverty, and social isolation. Community agencies should screen the veterans they serve to identify risk factors and refer them to the VA and other appropriate supportive services. Connecting veterans to a community of support, perhaps through a “Battle Buddies” program, could address feelings of social isolation.

Tsai, Jack, and Rosenheck, Robert A. "Risk Factors for Homelessness Among US Veterans" *Epidemiol Rev.* 2015; 37:177-195.