



NATIONAL COALITION *for* HOMELESS VETERANS

“Homelessness in a National Sample of Incarcerated Veterans in State and Federal Prisons” Jack Tsai, Robert A. Rosenheck, Wesley J. Kaspro, James F. McGuire

Quick Takeaways:

- Of all incarcerated veterans, 30 percent have a history of homelessness.
- Chronically homeless veterans were more likely to be Black or Hispanic, unmarried, and to have served in the Vietnam War.

Summary:

Data on 30,348 incarcerated male veterans served by the Health Care for Re-entry Veterans (HCRV) program were analyzed in this study. HCRV specialists met with incarcerated veterans to conduct pre-release assessments and provided short-term clinical management after release. Information on homeless history was obtained regarding: 1) whether and how long each veteran had been homeless before their current incarceration; and 2) how many separate episodes of homelessness they had experienced in the previous three years.

Sociodemographic characteristics reported by veterans included their age, gender, race/ethnicity, marital status, military history, and combat exposure. Incarcerated veterans were classified into four groups based on their history of past homelessness: not homeless, transiently homeless, episodically homeless, and chronically homeless.

Findings:

Veterans in all three homeless subgroups groups reported significantly higher mental health and substance abuse issues, and number of lifetime arrests than the not homeless group. The veterans in these groups also had an increased likelihood of incarceration for non-violent offenses such as drug or substance abuse, parole/probation violation, and property offenses.

Chronically homeless incarcerated veterans were older, more likely to be Black or Hispanic, less likely to be married, more likely to have served during the Vietnam War, and more likely to have no income. Incarcerated chronically homeless veterans were also arrested the most times in their lifetime. Incarcerated veterans who had not been homeless were less likely to be Black, worked more days in the previous month (post-release), and more likely to have served in post 9/11 operations.

Conclusion:

These findings suggest a relationship between mental health and substance use issues, homelessness, and incarceration. Re-entry programs working to break the cycle and prevent a reoccurrence of homelessness must address these issues as part of a comprehensive strategy. Further research regarding the direct ties between transient homelessness, episodic homelessness, and incarceration is needed.

Tsai, Jack, Rosenheck, Robert A., Kaspro, Wesley J., and McGuire, James F.. “Homelessness in a National Sample of Incarcerated Veterans in State and Federal Prisons”. *Adm Policy Ment Health*. 2014 May;41(3):360-7.