



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

*“Homelessness and Trauma Go Hand-in-Hand”*: Pathways to Homelessness among Women Veterans

Hamilton, A. B., Poza, I., & Washington, D. L. / [Full Report](#)

### Overview of Study and Findings:

- Homeless women veterans (N=29) in California-based focus group sessions discussed their life experiences and why homelessness occurs for this subpopulation of veterans.
- The authors argue that a “web of vulnerability” exists in which one problem affecting a veteran may snowball into, overlap with, or be caused by additional problems. This occurrence reveals the multidimensional nature of homelessness among female veterans.
- Many female veteran issues involve a person closely adhering to an “independence” mindset (i.e. working through negative situations alone). Life experiences, some of which are listed below, encourage a person to think in this manner.

### What Creates Female Veteran Homelessness?:

#### *Root 1: “Pre-Military Adversity”*

Situations under this category can relate to transient living situations before military service. This type of adversity may derive from enduring a disruptive home environment at an earlier time. An unhappy upbringing may make military enlistment an attractive and practical option for leading a different life. ***“Fifteen of the 29 participants (52%) described pre-military adversity (including child abuse and domestic violence) that either resulted in homelessness pre-military, or sowed ‘the seeds of homelessness’ that occurred post-military.”***

#### *Root 2: “Trauma and/or Substance Use During Military Service”*

Women may be the recipients of inappropriate attention (i.e. sexual misconduct, bullying) during their military tenures, and they may address these experience through substance or alcohol abuse.

#### *Root 3: “Post-Military Violence, Abuse, and Relationship Termination”*

Following military service, conflicts with spouses may set in motion the beginning of homelessness for female veterans. Substance abuse can occur as a result of these socially and emotionally volatile situations.



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### *Root 4: “Post-Military Substance Abuse, Mental Illness, and/or Medical Conditions”*

The use of drugs in post-military life may lead to debilitating health conditions. ***“In the first focus group, 7 of the 10 participants raised their hands when the moderator asked if drug use contributed to their homelessness.”*** At the same time, these decisions decrease a person’s employment outlook. In addition, useful assistance outlets for veterans may not always be conveniently located throughout the United States.

### *Root 5: “Unemployment”*

Limited or temporary employment markets may inhibit transition for female veterans. Economic downturns can create many roadblocks for veterans once their deployment has ended. Mental health issues can further impede job access and retention.

### *“Criminal Justice Involvement”*

Housing options are severely restricted for those still being monitored after their release from incarceration. Relatives who may have otherwise taken in veterans may be unable to do so if boundary limits apply to the formerly incarcerated person they want to help. The authors describe this as “a subsidiary factor that related to the roots” listed above.

Source: Hamilton, A. B., Poza, I., & Washington, D. L. (2011). Homelessness and Trauma Go Hand-in-Hand: Pathways to Homelessness among Women Veterans. *Women’s Health Issues*, 21-4S, S203-S209. Accessed from: [http://www.research.va.gov/media\\_roundtable/WHI-2011Jul-Aug21-HamiltonPozaWashington.pdf](http://www.research.va.gov/media_roundtable/WHI-2011Jul-Aug21-HamiltonPozaWashington.pdf).