



NATIONAL COALITION *for* HOMELESS VETERANS

Risk Factors for Homelessness among Women Veterans

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Quick Takeaways

- Homeless women veterans were significantly more likely than housed women veterans to be unemployed, disabled, and low-income; to have experienced military sexual trauma; to be in fair or poor health; to have diagnosed medical conditions; and to screen positive for an anxiety disorder, PTSD, or tobacco use.
- Homeless women veterans were significantly less likely to be college graduates, employed, married, or have health insurance, and were less likely to have used mental health services, Veterans Administration (VA) health care, or been hospitalized in the prior 12 months.

Summary

This report's objective was to determine risk factors for homelessness in non-institutionalized women veterans, and to contrast their health and health care use with those of a matched sample of housed women veterans. Homeless subjects were recruited using VA-affiliated and non-VA affiliated homeless service organization contacts. The study included 33 homeless women veterans and 165 housed women veterans.

Findings

Homeless women veterans were significantly more likely than housed women veterans to be unemployed, disabled, and low-income; to have experienced military sexual trauma (MST); to be in fair or poor health; to have diagnosed medical conditions; and to screen positive for an anxiety disorder, PTSD, or tobacco use. Homeless women had lower self-reported physical health and mental health scores than housed women. Homeless women veterans were significantly less likely to be college graduates, employed, married, or have health insurance, and were less likely to have used mental health services, VA health care, or been hospitalized in the prior 12 months.

Being unemployed and disabled were significant risk factors for being homeless, whereas being married and being a college graduate were protective factors. Experiencing MST and screening positive for an anxiety disorder were both highly correlated with screening positive for PTSD, and all were also significantly associated with being homeless. Homeless women veterans had an average of four entries into and exits out of homelessness. Additional characteristics of each group are elaborated in Table I in the report.

- Median length of time homeless = 2.1 years
- Median length of time since last being stably housed = 1.0 years
- Children under the age of 18 years living with them in the prior 12 months = 16%

Conclusion

The authors recommend integrating efforts to assess housed women veterans' risk factors for homelessness with clinical care programs within and outside the VA. Among women veterans, being unemployed, disabled, or unmarried were the strongest predictors of homelessness; however, in the non-veteran population, lack of financial resources and social resources are significant homelessness risk factors as well. For homeless women veterans who require treatment of PTSD, depression, MST, or tobacco use, expanding the geographic availability of female-only treatment programs will facilitate access to needed care. In addition, the authors recommend expanding availability of college education, job training, and transitional housing for all homeless women veterans.