



NATIONAL COALITION *for* HOMELESS VETERANS

“Effects of Sustained Abstinence Among Treated Substance-Abusing Homeless Persons on Housing and Employment”

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Quick Takeaways:

- For homeless individuals with cocaine dependence, consecutive weeks of abstinence during treatment is associated with long-term housing stability and employment.

Study:

This study examined the impact of sustained abstinence on long-term housing and employment outcomes of participants in Birmingham Health Care between November 2001 and June 2004. Eligibility requirements for participation included a diagnosis of cocaine dependency, homeless status (as defined by the McKinney Act), psychological distress, and willingness to participate. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two treatment groups: 1) abstinence-contingent housing and work training (standard); and 2) the standard treatment plus daily cognitive behavioral day treatment (enhanced).

Researchers compared the housing and employment outcomes for both groups at six, 12, and 18 months after treatment to determine the effects, if any, of the standard group, defined by sustained abstinence, and the treatment group on long-term housing and employment stability.

Findings:

Researchers found no difference in long-term housing and employment stability between the standard and enhanced treatment groups, despite the fact that the enhanced-treatment group achieved higher abstinence rates. However, the findings suggest strong relationships between sustained abstinence during treatment and housing (at 12 and 18 months) and employment (12 months). In addition to consecutive weeks of abstinence, age (older) and gender (male) were identified as predictors of housing stability and employment, respectively.

The researchers compared their findings – a strong relationship between housing stability and abstinence – to those of the Housing First trial, *“Housing First, Consumer Choice, and Harm Reduction for Homeless Individuals with a Dual Diagnosis”*¹ which suggest that abstinence may not impact long-term housing success.

Conclusion:

Inconsistent findings on the relevance of abstinence in achieving long-term housing and employment stability highlight the gaps in homeless research. Further study of a variety of alternatives is urgently needed to provide direction for future policy.

¹ Tsemberis S, Gulcur L, Nakae M. Housing First, consumer choice, and harm reduction for homeless individuals with a dual diagnosis. *Am J Public Health* 2004;94(4):651–656