



NATIONAL COALITION *for* HOMELESS VETERANS

“Veterans Health Administration Vocational Services for Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom Veterans with Mental Health Conditions”

Twamley, Elizabeth W., Dewleen G. Baker, Sonya B. Norman, James OE Pittman, James B. Lohr, and Sandra G. Resnick / [Full Report](#)

Quick Takeaways:

- Only 8.4% of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) or Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) veterans with mental health conditions received vocational services from the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), and only 2.2% received supported employment.
- Supported employment was strongly associated with veterans obtaining competitive employment.

Study:

Researchers analyzed VHA data from 2008 and 2009 on OIF/OEF veterans with a diagnosis of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, or substance use disorders. Veterans in the study often had mild traumatic brain injury (TBI) in addition to PTSD. Researchers broadly defined this set of diagnoses as “mental health conditions,” which researchers said could limit job readiness.

Researchers also examined how many veterans in the study used any sort of vocational services, and how many used supported employment. They tracked the number of times a veteran used the service, the length of time they were involved in the program, and for veterans where data was available, the length of competitive employment.

Findings:

Only 8.4% of veterans studied accessed any sort of vocational services, with 40% of those veterans having had one vocational session and 28% had five or more sessions. Researchers noted that while most veterans only had one or two vocational sessions this is not considered an intensive enough service and that most programs take one to two sessions to complete an initial assessment. However, even one encounter with vocational services was associated with better employment outcomes.

Supported employment was strongly associated with placement into competitive employment, 51% of veterans in supported employment obtaining competitive employment. However, only 2.2% of veterans in the study received supported employment. Researchers believe that this is because supported employment is typically reserved for veterans with a diagnosis of psychosis.

Conclusion:

Even a small number of encounters with vocational services is associated with improved employment outcomes, particularly supported employment. Despite this, veterans with mental health conditions access vocational services at very low rates. Researchers suggest that more resources should be directed towards VHA vocational services to serve veterans.

Twamley, E. W., Baker, D. G., Norman, S. B., Pittman, J. O., Lohr, J. B., & Resnick, S. G. (2013). Veterans Health Administration vocational services for Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom Veterans with mental health conditions. *Journal of rehabilitation research and development*, 50, 663-670.