

Why are us veterans becoming homeless?



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In this paper, I will focus on the topic of why veterans are coming back homeless. Veterans are seen as a savior of the country they are risking their lives for every day, so why is it that they are coming back from tours and service and ultimately ending up homeless? Since 2009 the United States stated that in five years they would end veteran homelessness, but the United States is still facing veteran homelessness in the year 2017. Though the homeless rates of veterans have gone down since then, why are veterans still facing homelessness if so many resources are supposed to be available for them. Is there more than meets the eye when it comes to homelessness, especially with veterans, yes. Many things can attribute to this continuing issue such as lack of assistances provided, mental illnesses, PTSD, lack or loss of support from being deployed, the use of drugs and alcohol as coping strategies, and the economics.

Homelessness is something that many individuals in every country face on a daily basis. The definition of homelessness can vary from what one individual to the next individual's definition of homelessness. The United States Department of Health and Human Service's definition of homelessness is:

An individual without permanent housing who may live on the streets, stay in a shelter, mission, single room occupancy facilities, abandoned building or vehicle, or in any other unstable or non-permanent situation. An individual may be considered as homeless if that person is "doubled up," a term that refers to a situation where individuals are unable to maintain their housing situation and are forced to stay with a series of friends and/or extended

family members. In addition, previously homeless individuals who are to be released from a prison or a hospital may be considered homeless if they do not have a stable housing situation to which they can return (U. S. D. of H. and H, n. d.).

The Veterans Assistance program (VA) was originally founded in 1811 by the federal government for veteran domiciliary and medical facilities, but at the time was named the Veterans Bureau. The federal government recognized the instability of an individual's living arrangements as a critical aspect of the definition of homelessness. Later on, in the 19th century, the Veterans Administration was expanded to include benefits and or pensions not only for veterans but for their widows and dependents if something were to have happened. After the Civil War, many states began to establish veteran's homes. Since domiciliary care was available at all state veteran's homes, coinciding with that medical and hospital treatment were also provided for all injuries and diseases, without discrimination of service area. Veterans of the Indian Wars, Civil War, Spanish-American War, and Mexican Border, as well as regularly discharged members of the United States Armed Forces, were able to receive care at these veteran homes (U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, n. d). As the United States entered World War I, congress established a new system of veteran's benefits, including programs for disability compensation, insurance for service personnel and veterans, and vocational rehabilitation for the disabled (U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, n. d). In 1928, admission to the national veteran homes was extended to all women who served, National Guard and militia Veterans (all able-bodied civilians eligible by law for military service) (U. S. Department of

Veterans Affairs, n. d). In 1930, President Herbert Hoover signed an executive order that elevated the Veterans Bureau to a federal administration creating the what is now known as the Veterans Administration. From 1944 through 1993, Veterans Administration guaranteed 13.9 million home loans valued at more than 433.1 billion dollars (U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, n. d). To assist a Veteran between discharge and reemployment, the GI Bill also provided unemployment benefits of 20 dollars a week, for up to a maximum of 52 weeks (U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, n. d). This assistance was put in place to avoid a repetition of World War I when unemployed Veterans were reduced to relying on charities for food and shelter. The Veterans Administration was then later renamed the Department of Veterans Affairs and continued to this day be known as the VA.

It was not until the early 1980s, when the United States entered a recession in 1980 with the unemployment rate remaining unchanged through the start of a second recession in 1981, that veteran homelessness began to be recognized as an important public health problem. The Veterans Administration has gone through many changes over the past 200 years since it was founded. But it still remains to be focused on offering veterans the resources in which it was founded, for domiciliary and medical needs of veterans who have served.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is one of the different ways a veteran can manifest postwar adjustment difficulties. PTSD is a mental health problem that some individuals can develop after experiencing or witnessing a life-threatening event, such as combat, a natural disaster, a car accident,
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or sexual assault. It is normal for an individual to have upsetting memories, feel on edge, or have trouble sleeping after a traumatic event. It may be hard to do normal activities, such as going to work, school, or spending time with people you care about. For some individuals, PTSD symptoms may not start right away, they may come and go over time. With PTSD, veterans may find it hard to keep their support groups such as family, friends and possible significant others close due to the symptoms of PTSD. Individuals can have a difficult time trying to get back into a routine that has now changed, whether they themselves are suffering from PTSD or individuals closest to those who are suffering.

Personally, coming from a family where my father is a veteran and my brother-in-law has been deployed 3 times in the past 4 years I have been able to see the costs that military families have to pay that can render them in hard financial situations in the future. For instance, military uniforms have multiple parts that are required, and if an individual is not wearing them they are out of conduct. Here is a cost breakdown of one of the 4 uniforms, military personnel are required to have. For combat and training, uniforms the required coat starts at 47. 51 dollars, 48. 00 dollars for the trousers, 8. 10 dollars for the patrol cap, 4. 77 dollars for the undershirt, 4. 07 dollars for the rigger belt, 350-100 dollars for boots, up to 25 dollars per insignia, and 200 dollars for the required backpack (Army & Air Force Exchange Services, n. d.). For just a combat uniform it can cost up to 700 dollars. For their formal uniforms, it can cost up to 500 dollars, and for physical training, uniforms it can cost up to 200 dollars. While they are given a uniform allowance, the military is constantly changing their uniforms and not compensating for that

change, making it stressful for some to try and find ways to pay for what they need. There is also the factor of paying for housing, while there are barracks that military personnel can live in, some chose to live in apartments off base, due to having more freedom or having a family. So, they can be paying the housing costs outside of the military, but when it comes to deployment if they are single and not living with someone else it can become an issue of trying to keep payments going to the landlord regularly and if something goes wrong there is a possibility of them losing their place to stay ultimately coming back homeless. When it comes to having a family, they usually try to stay in one area and not have to move so often due to inconveniences. But when the military personnel get stationed in a new state, it becomes a matter of is the whole family going to move only to have the military personnel deployed in a couple of months leaving the family in an unknown area with no support like they had before. Now if the family made the choice to stay, then they are paying for housing in two states, which put the family in a financial burden, but they are able to keep their support systems. A median annual income of Veterans was approximately \$50, 000 (Elbogen, et al., 2012). In their studies, they indicated that treatment costs for veterans were a barrier to obtaining psychiatric and proper care. The US Military released a pay grade chart for 2017 because they offer many different variations for each area I will only focus on serving for 4 years. These numbers are based on monthly pay rounded up to the nearest us dollar. As an E-1 for 4 years they would make 1592 dollars, E-2 1785 dollars, E-3 2115 dollars, E-4 2420 dollars, E-5 2656 dollars, E-6 2960 dollars, and E-7 3401 dollars (Military pay chart, 2016). These are numbers only for enlistees and not officers, seeing that enlistees are the most

common within the military. Substance abuse can be a leading factor in homelessness or continuing to be homeless. From a study conducted by Robert M. Bray, Mary Ellen Marsden, and Michael R. Peterson, they found that overall military personnel are more likely to drink and drink heavily than civilians are. Military personnel are twice as likely as civilians to be heavy drinkers, about one-third of military men who are younger drink heavily (Bray, et al., 1991).

Veterans that are most at risk of coming back from war homeless usually have multiple factors that lead to the problem. Most of the individuals are either single, divorced, widowed, lack of family support or support systems, rendering them unable for proper reentry into civilian life. When those in the military are deployed, they are housed at the bases in that area, if they have their own family back in the states they can find it difficult to communicate with them. The military does not offer free Wi-Fi or calling, so if they were wanting to communicate with those back home, they will have to pay a monthly fee to do so. If an individual cannot afford that fee, there is the possibility of them losing their connections and support.

Veterans who were officers and those who had graduated from college are more likely to have an easier readjusting process for their post-military life than enlisted personnel and those who are high school graduates. Along with veterans who mentioned they had an emotionally traumatic experience while serving or suffered a serious injury had more problems with re-entry when other factors are held constant.

Though I would like to provide a definite answer to why are United States veterans coming back homeless, there is still much research to do. There are many factors that can lead to an individual becoming homeless and that is the same for veterans. While there are many studies on veteran homelessness, my goal was to figure out why they are homeless, and while again there are many articles and studies they do not clearly focus on specifically why. I would say that I have not been able to fully answer my question of why United States veterans are coming back homeless, but I hope that in the future, I will be able to conduct my own studies on this topic and find a more concise answer. Until then I can only say that there are many factors that lead to this unfortunate event such as lack of assistances provided, mental illnesses, PTSD, lack or loss of support from being deployed, the use of drugs and alcohol as coping strategies, and the economics.

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