



California's Women Veterans and Homelessness

SHORT SUBJECTS

WOMEN VETERANS SERIES

December 2012

S-12-011

More than four percent of California women veterans surveyed in 2011 by CRB reported being currently homeless. This survey, conducted on behalf of the Commission on the Status of Women and Girls, and the California Department of Veteran Affairs (CalVet), sheds new light on homelessness among women veterans.

Neither the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) nor the U.S. Department on Housing and Urban Development (HUD) measures specifically the number of homeless women veterans.¹ However, the Government Accountability Office reported in 2011 that VA identification of homeless women veterans had more than doubled between 2006 and 2011.¹ The last "point in time" count of homelessness by HUD estimated that about 1 percent of California veterans were currently homeless, but this report did not delineate veterans by gender.³

One in seven women veterans responding to the survey were at some point, homeless. More than one in three had unstable housing.

In CRB's 2011 survey, 4.2 percent of all women veteran respondents were currently homeless. An additional 10.0 percent had been previously homeless and another 19.8 percent had unstable housing but were never homeless. This means that one in seven women veterans responding to the survey were at some point, homeless. More than one in three had unstable housing. The CRB survey is generally representative of women veterans on key factors such as age, education, rank, and marital status.

GROWING AWARENESS OF HOMELESSNESS

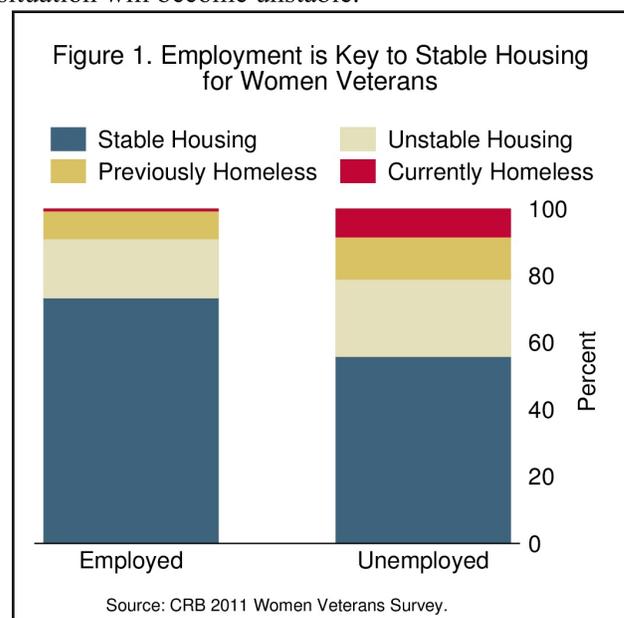
Both the VA and the California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) have a growing awareness of the unique needs of homeless women veterans. Programs

such as HUD-VASH (HUD-Veterans Supplemental Housing) are geared toward helping veterans and their families achieve stable housing. By creating benefits that help entire families, the VA, HUD and other agencies help women veterans who have children. Additionally, a number of women-only shelters have been established in California. These shelters provide a safe space for homeless women veterans, especially those who may have experienced military sexual trauma (MST). See the box entitled "Select Resources for Homeless Veterans" on the back of this sheet, for more information.

PRECIPITATES FOR HOMELESSNESS

Unemployment

Being employed, even partially, is a key to maintaining stable housing. While women veterans are mostly eligible for unemployment benefits, the loss of a job may precipitate the loss of housing. The longer a woman is unemployed, the more likely her housing situation will become unstable.



Data show that male veterans are employed at a more frequent rate than their civilian counterparts, but women veterans in the CRB survey reported a higher

unemployment rate than either male veterans or the population in general. Unemployment correlated highly with unstable housing. Three-quarters of women with a job of any kind (i.e., full-time employment, part-time employment, or self-employed) reported stable housing while only 56 percent of currently unemployed women had stable housing. Less than one percent of women with a current job were homeless while 8.5 percent of unemployed women respondents were currently homeless. See Figure 1 for more details.

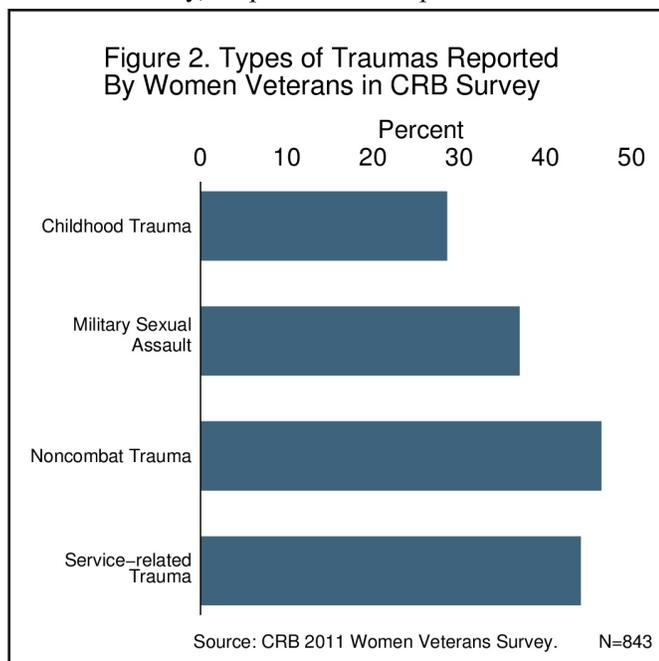
Divorce, Separation and Singlehood

Marital status also impacts a woman veteran's housing status. Married women veterans were much more likely to have stable housing than their divorced, separated or single peers. Of the respondents to the CRB survey, 76 percent of married and 88 percent of widowed respondents reported stable housing, while just over half of single, separated and divorced women reported such. Divorced and single women were more likely to be homeless than their married peers.

Trauma

Most women veterans have experienced some sort of trauma. Trauma may be in the form of events such as service-related combat trauma, MST, physical assault, or childhood abuse. The repercussions of certain traumatic experiences – inability to trust people, mental health conditions, fear – can lead to difficulties in maintaining stable housing.²

Among the women surveyed in the CRB 2011 Women Veterans Survey, 37 percent had experienced sexual



SELECT RESOURCES FOR HOMELESS VETERANS

VA Hotline for Homeless and At-Risk Veterans:
1-877-4AID-VET or www.va.gov/homeless

VA Crisis Hotline: 1-800-237-8255

CalVet Resource Line for Homeless Veterans:
1-800-952-5626 or
<http://www.calvet.ca.gov/VetServices/HomelessVeterans.aspx>

Information on eligibility for HUD-VASH program:
http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/HUD-VASH_Eligibility.asp

assault while in the military and 53 percent reported experiencing some other type of trauma during their service. More than a quarter of all respondents reported experiencing abuse prior to entering the service. See Figure 2. For more information, see the CRB brief *California's Women Veterans and MST* (www.library.ca.gov/crb/12/S-12-004.pdf).

CITATIONS

1. Government Accountability Office. (2011). *Homeless Women Veterans: Actions Needed to Ensure Safe and Appropriate Housing*. Government Accountability Office: Washington, D.C. <http://www.gao.gov/assets/590/587334.pdf>.
2. U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau. (2012). *Trauma-Informed Care for Women Veterans Experiencing Homelessness: A Guide for Service Providers*. U.S Department of Labor: Washington, D.C. <http://www.dol.gov/wb/trauma/#.UJqYPtIRSk0>.
3. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2012). "2011 Veteran PIT Counts by CoC." <http://www.hudhre.info/index.cfm?do=viewResource&ResourceID=4568>.

This brief was requested by the California Commission on the Status of Women and Girls.

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