

Homeless Veterans in Minnesota **Highlights from the October 2009 survey**

Since 1991, Wilder has conducted a statewide survey on homelessness every three years to better understand the causes, circumstances and effects of homelessness.

This summary provides key facts and findings from the survey about U.S. military veterans.

Key findings

Numbers of homeless

- In total, the 2009 study identified 669 homeless veterans, including 605 men and 64 women, residing in emergency shelters, battered women's shelters, and transitional housing programs or in non-sheltered locations. There were 65 children accompanying the interviewed veterans.
- The number of veterans identified in 2009 is 7 percent higher than in 2006 (up by 45 people).
- Overall, 1 in 10 homeless adults (11%) and approximately 1 in 5 homeless men (19%), served in the military at some time. By comparison, military veterans made up 10 percent of all adults in Minnesota, (19 percent of adult men and 1 percent of adult women).

Who is homeless?

- The vast majority of homeless veterans were male (90%). However, the number and proportion of homeless women veterans has increased greatly, more than doubling from 29 in 2006 to 64 in 2009.
- The average age of homeless male veterans was 48, and the average age of homeless female veterans was 39.
- The percentage of homeless veterans who had never married was lower than that of the general homeless population (42% vs. 63%). Nearly half of homeless veterans reported that they were divorced (41%) or separated (7%)

METHODS

On October 22, 2009, 522 veterans were staying in emergency shelters and transitional housing facilities in Minnesota. Interviews were conducted with 476 veterans (431 males and 45 females), whose responses were weighted to represent the total number of veterans. An additional 147 veterans (140 men and 7 women) were interviewed in non-shelter locations. Interviews with people in non-sheltered locations could not be weighted, because there is no method to determine the total population in such settings. Comparisons to the 2006 study should be made with caution, because one major veterans program that participated in the 2006 study was unable to participate in 2009. However, examination of survey results suggests that the overall statewide results for 2009 are reliable and can support year-to-year comparisons with only a slightly expanded margin of sampling error.

- Less than one-quarter of homeless veterans (22%) had lived in Minnesota for two years or less. About 71 percent had lived in Minnesota for more than five years, including 47 percent who had lived in Minnesota for more than 20 years.
- Forty-six percent of Minnesota's homeless veterans are persons of color, even though persons of color make up less than 11 percent of the state's overall population. Particularly over-represented are African Americans in the Twin Cities 7-county metro area (41%) and both African Americans (10%) and American Indians (20%) in greater Minnesota.
- Nearly half (45%) of veterans interviewed had served in the U.S. Army, 22 percent in the U.S. Navy, 17 percent in the U.S. Marines, 7 percent in the U.S. Air Force, 7 percent in the National Guard, 2 percent in the Reserves, and less than 1 percent in the Coast Guard.

continued

- Sixty percent of homeless veterans had served more than two years, 25 percent between six months and two years, 7 percent between three and six months, and 7 percent under three months. Two percent of the homeless veterans began their military service prior to August 1964, 24 percent between August 1964 and May 1975, 25 percent between June 1975 and September 1980, 43 percent between October 1980 and March 2003, and 6 percent after March 2003.
- One quarter (26%) of homeless veterans reported having served in a combat zone. Nine percent in Vietnam, 9 percent in the first Gulf War, 5 percent in Iraq or Afghanistan, and less than 1 percent each served in Korea, Granada, Panama, Lebanon, Honduras, and Iran.
- Veterans interviewed in informal and unsheltered locations were predominantly male (95%), and over half (57%) had been homeless for a year or longer. American Indians made up 22 percent of veterans interviewed in informal and unsheltered locations.
- Twenty-five percent of homeless veterans who had school-age children with them reported having at least one child who had an emotional or behavioral problem that interfered with the child's daily activities.

Education, employment, and income

- The percentage of homeless veterans who had completed high school was much higher than the general homeless population (95% vs. 74%). The percentage who had attended at least some college was also higher than for the general homeless population (51% vs. 29%).
 - Eighteen percent of homeless veterans were employed; 6 percent were employed full-time. Of those who were employed, nearly two-thirds (65%) earned less than \$10 per hour. Sixty-one percent of those who were employed had been at their current job for three months or more.
 - Those who were not working reported that their main barriers to employment were physical health (32%), economic opportunities (24%), transportation (21%), mental health problems (18%), criminal background (13%), age (12%), lack of housing (10%), and lack of job history (10%).
 - Homeless veterans reported their main sources of income in the month of October came from: General Assistance (29%), steady employment (13%), Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) (8%), Supplemental Security Income (SSI) (8%), and day labor (6%).
 - When asked about their total income for October, 9 percent of homeless veterans reported some income but less than \$100, 31 percent reported incomes of \$101-\$300, 11 percent reported incomes of \$301-\$500, 15 percent reported incomes of \$501-\$800, and 19 percent reported incomes over \$800. Ninety-nine (15%) reported no income in October. The average income was \$456; the median income was \$213.
- Children of homeless veterans**
- Although 32 percent of homeless veterans reported having children under the age of 18, only 29 percent of those parents had any children with them on the night of the survey. Those parents represented 9 percent of all homeless veterans surveyed.
 - Of the homeless veterans who had children with them, 35 percent were unable to obtain needed child care in the previous 12 months, 18 percent were unable to obtain needed dental care, and 7 percent were unable to obtain needed health care for at least one of their children. Nine percent of the homeless parents reported that their children had to skip meals in the last month.
 - Forty-two homeless parents had a least one school-age child. Forty-four percent reported that at least one of their school-age children had some type of learning or school-related problem, and 22 percent reported having a child who had repeated a grade in school. Thirty-four homeless parents (81%) reported that their children attended school on the day of the survey.

History of homelessness

- Three-quarters (74%) of homeless veterans had been homeless more than once. One-quarter (24%) reported they had been homeless two to three times in their lives, 25 percent had been homeless four to seven times, and 25 percent had been homeless eight or more times. The average age they first became homeless was 33.8, and the median age was 32.
- The proportion of homeless veterans who fit Minnesota's definition of long-term homeless – homeless a year or longer, or homeless four or more times in the past three years – was 63 percent. The proportion of homeless veterans who fit the federal definition of chronic homeless was 55 percent. In addition to being homeless a year or longer, or homeless 4 or more times in the past three years, only single adults and those with chronic disabilities meet the federal definition.
- Twenty percent of homeless veterans reported having been unable to obtain shelter in the previous three months because of a lack of available beds. Of those, most ended up sleeping outdoors (37%), in cars or other enclosed places not meant for habitation (21%), in another shelter (18%), or with friends or family (14%). Others received a voucher for a motel (5%), or were housed in a church (1%), in a public place open 24 hours (1%), in a hospital (1%), in a motel (no voucher) (1%), or in detox (1%).
- One-third (33%) of homeless veterans spent at least one night outdoors during the month of October. The average number of nights spent outdoors was 3.3. One-third (34%) of homeless veterans spent at least one night during October “doubled-up” with friends or family. The average number of nights spent “doubled-up” was 3.2.

Residential placements

- Two-thirds (67%) of homeless veterans had lived in at least one kind of institution or residential program including a drug or alcohol treatment facility (55%), a halfway house (32%), a mental health treatment facility (22%), a group home (15%), or a foster home (13%).

- Nearly three-fifths (59%) of homeless veterans had been in a correctional facility in their lives, such as in a county jail or workhouse (55%), a state or federal prison (25%), or a juvenile detention center (14%).

Housing

- The most common reasons cited for leaving last regular housing were: Loss of a job (53%), inability to afford the rent (48%), eviction (36%), a drinking or drug problem (29%), or a break-up with a spouse or partner (25%). The most commonly cited barriers to regaining housing were: Lack of a job or income (45%), credit problems (21%), a criminal background (20%), or no housing they could afford (19%).
- The average amount that homeless veterans could pay for rent, including utilities, was \$240 a month. The median amount was \$170. Close to one-third (30%) reported they could not pay anything for rent. Nearly two-thirds (65%) needed only an efficiency or studio apartment.

Public assistance and service use

- Five percent of homeless veterans (3% of men and 25% of women) had received MFIP (welfare assistance) in the previous 12 months.
- One-fifth (19%) of homeless veterans reported the loss of one or more services or public assistance benefits during the previous 12 months. Those who had lost benefits most frequently reported the loss of food stamps (45%), medical benefits (45%), or unemployment benefits (20%). One third (34%) of all homeless veterans said they needed help to apply or re-apply for services.
- Three-fourths (75%) of homeless veterans reported having had some type of medical coverage in October, and nearly half (48%) reported having used food stamps in October. Other service use included hot meal programs (43%), free clothing shelves (42%), transportation assistance (40%), drop-in centers (32%), emergency room (24%), food shelves (24%), free medical clinic (23%), and state or federal veterans benefits (23%).
- Forty-two percent of homeless veterans reported having had contact with their County Veterans Service Officer during the previous 12 months.

- One-quarter (24%) of homeless veterans had attended a Veterans Stand Down event in the previous 12 months.
- Over one-quarter (27%) of homeless veterans had attended a Project Homeless Connect event in the previous 12 months.

Health and well-being

- Forty-four percent of homeless veterans reported a service-related health problem. Of those veterans, 39 percent reported a mental health problem, and four percent reported a service-related head injury or traumatic brain injury.
- Forty-three percent of homeless veterans had at least one chronic medical condition (asthma, other chronic lung or respiratory problems, high blood pressure, diabetes, tuberculosis, hepatitis, or HIV/AIDS). Of those, 73 percent received care for a chronic health condition in the previous year.
- Fifty-six percent of homeless veterans said they currently needed to see a dentist, 47 percent needed to see a doctor for a physical health problem, 40 percent needed to see a professional for a mental health problem, and 15 percent needed to see a professional for a chemical dependency problem. More than one-quarter (29%) reported problems getting needed medical care.
- Three-fourths (76%) of homeless veterans had a regular place to go for medical care. Of those, 41 percent received medical care at a clinic that required fees or insurance, and 35 percent received care at a Veterans Administration Medical Center.

Mental and chemical health

- Mental illness was a significant problem among homeless veterans in Minnesota. Half (50%) had been told by a doctor or nurse within the previous two years that they had at least one of the following serious mental health disorders: schizophrenia, manic-depression, some type of delusional disorder, major depression, anti-social personality disorder, or post-traumatic stress disorder. Adding those who had received inpatient or outpatient mental health treatment in the previous two years, 57 percent can be described as having a serious mental health problem.

- The specific mental health disorders reported by homeless veterans included major depression (40%), post-traumatic stress disorder (29%), manic-depression (24%), anti-social personality disorder or another serious emotional disorder (18%), some other type of delusional disorder (8%), and schizophrenia (6%).
- More than two-fifths (45%) of homeless veterans say that they are an alcoholic or chemically dependent. One third (32%) report being told by a doctor or nurse within the previous two years that they have a drug disorder or an alcohol disorder. Twenty-eight percent of homeless veterans received inpatient alcohol or drug treatment within the past two years. Nearly one-fifth of homeless veterans (19%) received outpatient alcohol or drug treatment in the past two years.
- Nearly one-quarter (23%) of homeless veterans have a dual diagnosis of mental illness and a chemical dependency. This is based on the percent of persons who reported being told by a doctor or nurse within the past two years that they have a major mental illness (schizophrenia, paranoia, manic-depression, major depression, anti-social personality or post-traumatic stress disorder) and alcohol or drug abuse disorder. By comparison, about one-sixth (17%) of the statewide homeless population surveyed in 2009 reported a dual diagnosis.

Serious or chronic disability

- Over half (54%) of homeless veterans reported a physical, mental, or other health condition limited the amount or type of work they could do. Nearly one-sixth (15%) reported that a health condition limited their daily activities, and over one-third (36%) reported problems with memory, concentration, or decision-making.
- Pooling these disabilities with chronic medical conditions, mental illness, and substance abuse, 84 percent of homeless veterans had at least one serious or chronic disability.
- Over one-third (36%) of homeless veterans had a history that suggests likely traumatic brain injury. This rate was higher for recent veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan (69%).

Abuse and victimization

- About one-third (32%) of homeless veterans reported physical mistreatment as a child (30% of men and 54% of women), and nearly one-fifth (18%) reported they were sexually mistreated as children (14% of men and 56% of women).
- About one-quarter (26%) of homeless veterans had stayed in an abusive situation for lack of other housing options (22% of men and 70% of women), and about one-quarter (26%) of homeless female veterans left their previous housing to flee domestic violence. Thirteen percent of homeless veterans (11% of men and 36% of women) had been in an abusive relationship in the previous 12 months.
- Twenty-six percent of homeless female veterans had been approached to work in the sex industry.
- One-fifth (21%) had been physically or sexually attacked at some time while they were homeless (19% of men, 46% of women), and 11 percent had sought health care for injuries due to violence in the previous year (10% of men and 21% of women).

Comparison of homeless male veterans to non-veteran homeless men

Despite the increase in the number of women veterans, the vast majority (90%) of homeless veterans are men. While veterans include 19 percent of homeless men, only 2 percent of homeless women had served in the military (1% in 2006). Unless otherwise stated, the descriptions given below apply only to male veterans.

Homeless veterans reported childhood experiences that were less traumatic, on average, than those of non-veterans. Compared to other homeless adults, fewer veterans had ever lived in an out-of-home placement or institution as a child. However, approximately equal proportions reported that they had been physically or sexually abused as children.

HOMELESS MALE VETERANS COMPARED TO OTHER HOMELESS MEN

	Male veterans N=605	Other homeless men N=2,534
Average (mean) age	48	39
Age 34 or younger	8%	37%
Located in Twin Cities metro area	74%	69%
At least a HS diploma or GED	95%	72%
Some college	51%	22%
Racial or ethnic minority	49%	62%
Ever incarcerated	62%	64%
Ever homeless before	74%	74%
Homeless a year or longer now	59%	56%
Employed	18%	16%
Working full-time (35+ hr/wk)	6%	5%
Childhood trauma and placements	N=605	N=2,534
Spent a week (or more) in a juvenile detention center	14%	27%
Foster care (as child)	11%	18%
Group home (as child)	7%	13%
Drug treatment facility (as child)	4%	7%
Physically or sexually abused (as child)	33%	30%
First experienced homelessness before age 18	13%	22%
First experienced homelessness before age 26	32%	51%

Health	Male veterans N=605	Other homeless men N=2,534
Service-related health problem (% of combat vets)	44% (61%)	(n.a.)
Chronic health condition	58%	45%
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (% of combat vets)	28% (42%)	15% (n.a.)
Major depression	38%	33%
Serious mental illness	55%	49%
Ever considered suicide	37%	33%
Ever attempted suicide	21%	18%
Alcohol abuse disorder	28%	23%
Drug abuse disorder	17%	16%
Dual diagnosis (mental health and substance abuse disorder)	22%	18%
Barriers to housing	N=605	N=2,534
Credit problems	20%	13%
Criminal history	31%	39%
Bad rental history	9%	4%
Mental health problems	4%	4%
Physical health problems	31%	19%
Barriers to employment	N=551	N=2,534
<i>Employment barriers cited by unemployed veterans:</i>		
Transportation	18%	23%
Mental health problems	18%	15%
Lack of housing	9%	10%
Age	12%	4%
Criminal history	23%	33%
<i>Potential employment barriers based on survey:</i>		
Mental illness problems	46%	43%
Long-term unemployment	65%	63%
Alcohol or drug problem	63%	51%

Physical and mental health

Homeless male veterans are more likely than other homeless men to have considered suicide or attempted suicide, to have a mental illness and/or chemical dependency problem, or to have a chronic health condition. Homeless veterans (especially combat veterans) are also much more likely to experience Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Barriers to housing

Homeless male veterans report housing barriers similar to those reported by other homeless men. Veterans are somewhat more likely to cite credit problems, bad rental history (including eviction), or mental illness as current barriers to housing.

Other possible housing barriers include lack of a job, previous homelessness, mental illness, current homelessness that has lasted a year or longer, substance abuse, and a prior history of incarceration.

Barriers to employment

The percentage of veterans who are employed is similar to other homeless men, and about the same proportion are working full-time (35 hours or more a week). The barriers to employment identified are similar to those identified by other homeless men (physical health problems, lack of transportation, mental health problems, and lack of housing). Veterans more often than non-veterans mention age as a barrier to employment. Fifty-five percent have been unemployed for a year or longer.

Some of these differences may be attributable to the fact that homeless male veterans, on average, are nine years older than other homeless men.

Challenges to effective service strategies

In order to be effective, homelessness prevention and other service efforts to support homeless veterans must consider the following:

More homeless female veterans: According to a recent article, *Homeless on the Homefront*, by Andrea Mayfield (Healthy Generations, Summer 2010. University of Minnesota School of Public Health; 7-8), currently 18 percent of post-9/11 veterans are women and their representation in the homeless population is increasing. In Minnesota's statewide survey, the population of homeless women, although small, more than doubled since the last study in 2006 (from 29 to 64).

A higher unemployment rate for veterans: That same article reported that the unemployment rate for homeless veterans who had served in the military since September 11, 2001 was 10.2 percent, compared to a jobless rate of 8.1 percent for all veterans.

In Minnesota, lack of employment is a significant barrier to stable housing. The 2009 statewide survey found eighty-two percent of homeless veterans were currently unemployed. Among those who were employed, about two-thirds earned less than \$10 an hour. The main barriers to employment among homeless veterans were physical health problems (32%), lack of job opportunities (24%), lack of transportation (21%), and mental health problems (18%).

Changes in the risk markers for homelessness

post-9/11: Currently, most homeless veterans served in Vietnam. The Mayfield article points out that Veterans returning from serving in Iraq and Afghanistan are younger and their risk-markers for homelessness may be unique. Their combat exposures and related disabilities may also be different. In 2009, 21 percent of post-9/11 veterans had a service-connected disability, compared to 13 percent of all veterans.

The Minnesota survey shows that 84 percent of homeless veterans have at least one serious or chronic disability. In addition, over one-third (36%) have a history indicative of traumatic brain injury. These results suggest an increasingly urgent need for careful assessment and triage following discharge and additional services to help veterans gain housing and employment in a difficult economic environment.

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Wilder Research

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451 Lexington Parkway North
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104

651-280-2700

www.wilderresearch.org



For more information on homelessness in Minnesota go to www.wilder.org/homelessness.0.html.

For more information about this report, contact June Heineman at Wilder Research, 651-280-2693.
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