

Broken Valor

Throughout history, leaders have waged war over meaningless things in the name of God, glory, and gold, using their followers as pawns. With little to no regard for those followers, those leaders push them through the torments of warfare. After the wars are over, those followers are tossed aside and told to cope with the trauma of said war. This historic insufficient support for veterans when they return from deployment is the primary cause of veteran's unemployment and mental health crises today. If veterans were to get the support they needed, veteran suicide, homelessness, and unemployment rates would not be as high as they are.

In a study done in 2021 by Nichter and colleagues, an astounding fact was revealed:

According to the most recent data from the Department of Veteran Affairs, 28 veterans die by suicide each day in the United States (2019). After adjustment for age and sex, the suicide rate among US military veterans has climbed more than 50% since 2005, and is currently at its highest level in US history (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2019) (p. 607).

That is nearly 22% of all suicides reported in a day, and more than one suicide an hour. Along with that, a study investigated by J. H. Raad and their colleagues estimated that 8.5% of all veterans have experienced homelessness. Veterans make up only 6.7% of the population, but they make up around 11% of the United States' homeless population (2020, p. 335). The military does use many abbreviations, and many of them will be used in this paper. Some of these are: *DoD*, which means Department of Defense, *PTSD*, which stands for post traumatic stress disorder, *DVA*, which means Department of Veterans Affairs, *VA*, which is used to refer to the hospital facilities provided to veterans, and *Vet*, which is a shortened phrase for veteran. There are various reasons for why veterans experience such severe mistreatment. Many trickle back to one main reason: the trauma they received from deployment.

There are many factors that lead to people becoming homeless, but mental health and chronic health issues have proven to be the greatest factors of homelessness in veterans in the 21st century. **Hey imma just submit this, I proofread for my mistakes, and am proud of this product. Thank you so fuckin much for your help, I appreciate you a lot. You specifically made this paper so easy. I cannot describe how thankful I am.**

PTSD has been on the radar of medical professionals and leading experts in the scientific community since World War I, no more than six months after it started. More recently, PTSD and other traumas have been detected among veterans of the wars in Vietnam and Afghanistan. In a study done by Nichter and collaborators, it was found that nearly a quarter (23.1%) of veterans in this experiment had violent thoughts against others. In another portion of this study a quarter (24.5%) of veterans had high feelings of betrayal by leaders and comrades (2021, p. 610). These violent thoughts toward others are not necessarily their fault; they happen because the veterans are not given the proper treatment they need to function outside an active battle zone. Considering the trauma endured in combat, it is no wonder why veterans struggle to find work after being discharged. This lack of funds leads to their high homelessness rates; if they cannot find a well-paying job, then they will not be able to sustain a house. However, not every unemployed and homeless veteran has a mental illness; sometimes their impairments are physical. In the study mentioned before by Raad et. al., they found the top three medical

conditions suffered by homeless veterans to be health related chronic disorders; specifically, hypertension, heart disease, and back pain (2020, p. 338). One may look at this list and think, “how is hypertension related to seeing combat?” When put in a high-stress environment for a long period of time, one develops high blood pressure that does not go down when the stressor is removed from the equation. Looking at the rest of the top 10 conditions, PTSD, substance abuse, alcohol abuse, and bipolar disorder is found (2020, p. 338). In the discussion of their research, Raad and their contributors concluded that “Many Veterans who experience homelessness or housing instability are also living with chronic health conditions, substance use, and mental health disorders” (2020, pp. 337–338). Going further, out of the 14,547 homeless veterans included in this study, only 599 were not receiving care for a chronic condition (2020, p. 337). From this data, it can be concluded that chronic illness, substance use, and mental illnesses all contribute to homelessness in veterans. But why are veterans who have chronic illnesses more likely to be on the streets than a civilian with chronic illnesses? Civilians with chronic illnesses tend to already have a support system in place, either having a family to depend on to house them, or having had a stable career to build up the money to take care of themselves/ good, private insurance. Yes, veterans have free healthcare, but their benefits can be difficult to access, only cover so much, and do not cover invasive surgeries. With this, one can see that most veterans that are homeless struggle with a chronic condition that affects their abilities to acquire a steady job and to maintain a household. And with the aforementioned higher likelihood of feeling aggression towards others, this makes finding a job and sustaining a household even harder. In the discussion of their research, Raad and their contributors concluded that “Many Veterans who experience homelessness or housing instability are also living with chronic health conditions, substance use, and mental health disorders” (2020, pp. 337–338).

Trauma from their deployments causes veterans to trust less, taking away from their chances of choosing to get help. As stated in the previous paragraph, veterans have had a high rate of feelings of betrayal. In a 2020 study referenced by Nicher et. al, Maugen and their researchers found in a population-based study of post-9/11 veterans that feelings of transgressions against others were similar (27.9%) to pre-9/11 veterans, but feelings of transgressions against themselves (18.8%) and feelings of betrayal (41.1%) were decently higher (2021, p. 607). Post-9/11 veterans include many of the men and women who make up the workforce today. They are a significant part of America's present, yet they have higher rates of suicidal ideation and betrayal from their deployments. The almost 50% of veterans who have feelings of betrayal speaks volumes alone. How does one expect these men and women to successfully assimilate back into society when they have been left with severe trust issues? Still on this topic, in a study done in the United Kingdom by Farrand and colleagues, it is found that programs sponsored by organizations like the VA or the DoD have an adverse effect on veterans and "having the service delivered by an organization outside of the armed forces was additionally important in promoting confidence that service use would remain confidential" (2018, pp. 395–396). The thing is, most programs designed to help veterans are from the DoD or VA, leading to the question of how veterans are supposed to get help when they are afraid of those offering help. In another study done by Bloeser and collaborators regarding veterans who sought help for GWIs, it is found that "Veterans expressed the belief that the military failed to protect them from environmental exposures" (2021, np). As one can see, the idea of veterans feeling betrayed by their government has once again come back. If one thing is clear, veterans' mistreatment comes from their feelings of betrayal. Going on, Bloeser and co-researchers claim "Veterans' concerns regarding subsequent quality of healthcare were intrinsically linked to a

belief that, despite official documentation to the contrary, the predominant paradigm of both the U.S. Department of Defense and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is that GWI does not exist” (2021, np). How are veterans supposed to get enriching help, when those around them deny their illnesses even exist. This denial puts off veterans from even wanting to go to a doctor, because they are afraid their needs will be dismissed. The trauma from open battle, and the betrayal of those around them have caused vets to feel alone and scared of things that are supposed to be helping them. Because of these systematic failures of VA healthcare, veterans now feel left behind, and scared of the resources that are supposed to help them. How are veterans supposed to get help when they cannot trust the help?

Lastly, even though there are support systems and free healthcare in place, lack of access and seemingly punishment for suicidal ideation renders it useless. In a study done by Ward and colleagues, they found “many veterans still perceive that the VA is more interested in lowering cost or denying service than providing needed care. At least part of the reason for this perception is that rural veterans were often unaware of programs designed to help them, which further increased their frustration and provided “evidence” that the VA did not want them to use the facilities” (2017, p. 672). Distance is not the only issue in many cases; sometimes it is just unfair punishment for seeking help. In a research initiative done by McCarl, some astounding stories were uncovered. One such was of a man named Sean Duvall. Duvall was a recently divorced father of two, who had just lost his job. His life was at an all time low, and was contemplating suicide with a homemade gun. As a veteran, Duvall called the veteran suicide line, and with the guidance of the hotline worker, was talked out of suicide, and was even put on medicine and enrolled in counselling. A week later, Duvall was arrested on charges of illegally carrying a concealed weapon. The charges were dropped by the request of a federal prosecutor so that

prosecutor could charge Duvall with four federal charges related to the makeshift weapon with which he planned to commit suicide (2013, p. 430). In this instance, Duvall was punished for wanting to commit suicide. Duvall's intentions with that weapon were not to harm others, but they were going to charge him as a terrorist. This is sadly not a very rare occurrence, and even happens in active duty officers as well, like in the case of Private Lazzaric Caldwell. Private Caldwell was diagnosed with PTSD and a personality disorder while in service of the Marine Corps. Afterwards, the military charged him with many offenses, an ex-fiance stabbed him, he experienced many family deaths, and when he heard the news of a friend's passing was he driven to suicide. Private Caldwell had tried to cut his wrists, but was found and "patched up". Later, he was charged by the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) for "intentional self-injury without intent to avoid service," and was sentenced to 180 days in jail, dishonorably discharged from the Marines and consequently lost any VA benefits. Yet a soldier who succeeds in their attempt is given a funeral service and a cause of death that reads died in the line of duty (McCarl, 2013, p.426). Military members and veterans are being punished for being suicidal, and are even subliminally told not to fail, or else their lives will be screwed up. There is no room left for improvement in suicide prevention if those who attempt suicide are punished for it.

Of course, there is help for these veterans, and some may argue that the existing help is enough. Some may claim that this help is easy for veterans to access through calls and video conferences. Some claim that homelessness is very low in veterans, so why not focus on the general public instead? According to a survey done by the DVA, around 4.7 million veterans live in rural communities without close access to a VA hospital; this accounts for nearly a quarter (24%) of all veterans (2016, np), and in the case of these veterans, they do not have access to these solutions. To put it in perspective, here in North Georgia, there are around 20,000 veterans

who do not have a VA hospital near their residence, so they are forced to drive 3-4 hours to their nearest VA hospitals in Atlanta and Augusta. This is not easily accessible healthcare, and is not a valid solution. The homeless population in America is tragic, yes, but also somewhat self-made. The main cause of homelessness, according to the National Law Center On Homelessness & Poverty, is a lack of affordable housing (2015, np). This makes the housing markets more competitive, and in turn more expensive. This can cause rent prices to spike, inhibiting many from being able to pay for their houses, and getting evicted... and this applies to veterans as well as the general population. The issues within populations of veterans are made worse by their incapacity to acclimate with society after their deployment, so just focusing on the housing market inflation will not address their homelessness. While many claim that veterans have it already made with the GI bill and free healthcare, these services are not effective in every instance. Imagine though, if there was a valid support system for these men and women. If there were resources that helped them find jobs, deal with their aggression towards others, give them easy access to healthcare, and mend their feelings of betrayal, they would be able to become a functioning member of society once again.

Veterans dedicate so much to protect the civilians of their countries, yet all over the world they are suffering. They suffer unemployment, living on the streets in cardboard boxes, the mental fatigue and stress of seeing all the violence on the battlefield. Yet when they come home, society turns a cold shoulder to them. America as a collective people needs to rise up, show them compassion, stand against the big money in power that cares nothing about the people they send to work. Lobby for corrective bills in Washington, create a demonstration for the whole world to see, show them how to treat their ill and downtrodden heroes. An America that punishes those who make America great is not so great after all.