



## RESEARCH BRIEF

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### Supported Employment for Justice-Involved Homeless and Unemployed Veterans with Mental Illness and/or Substance Use Disorder

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#### What do we know?

Many individuals experiencing homelessness have prior or current criminal justice system involvement. This association appears to be bi-directional. Incarceration may increase the risk of homeless by reducing community ties and opportunities for housing, and, conversely, homelessness may motivate criminal behavior as a means of surviving with limited resources.<sup>1</sup>

One critical area of importance to both those experiencing homelessness and those released from prison is the need for employment. Past studies have found that Individualized Placement and Support – Supported Employment (IPS)<sup>2,3</sup> is beneficial in facilitating employment in both groups.<sup>4,5</sup> However, several domains remain unclear. The first is whether and to what extent IPS will demonstrate continued effectiveness with individuals with cooccurring homelessness and past incarceration. The second is whether IPS is associated with moving out of homelessness into more stable housing.

This brief conducts a secondary analysis on a VA RR&D MERIT funded study focused on the use of IPS with Veterans with histories of prison incarceration and mental illness and/or substance use disorder. The original study compared a group-based vocational intervention to the same group-based vocational intervention enhanced with modified IPS. The current evaluation examined the subset of Veterans in that study who were

experiencing homelessness at the time of enrollment. Sixty-three Veterans experiencing homelessness (defined as living on the streets, in a shelter, or VA homeless program) were evaluated. Forty-four met U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's definition of chronic homelessness. Twenty-five received the group-based vocational intervention only while thirty-eight received the group-based vocational intervention plus modified IPS.

## **New information provided by the study**

### **Employment Results**

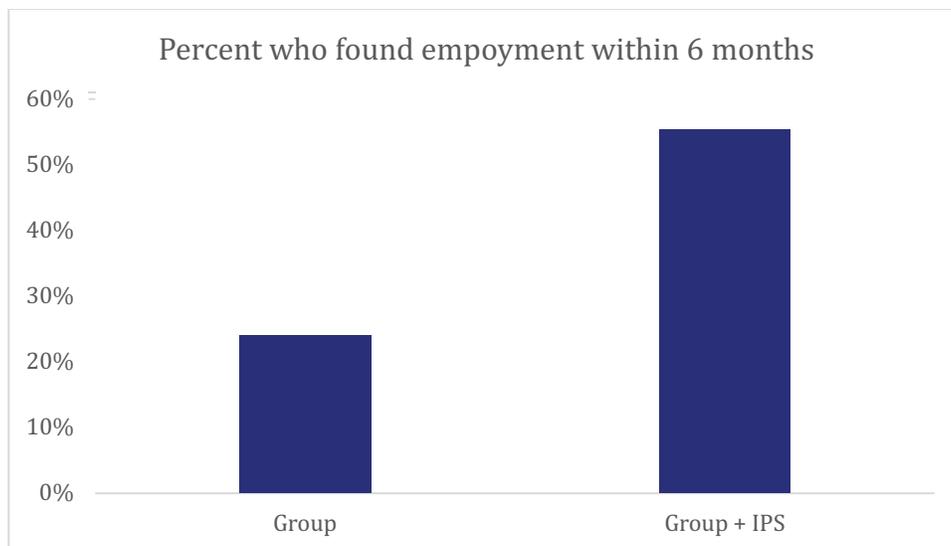
Results found a significantly higher number of Veterans were employed in the group-based vocational intervention plus modified IPS compared to group-based vocational intervention alone. At six months, 21 (55.3%) of homeless Veterans with incarceration and mental illness and/or substance use disorder histories receiving group-based vocational intervention plus modified IPS had found employment compared to only 6 (24.0%) of the those receiving group-based vocational intervention only. The success of group-based vocational intervention plus modified IPS extended to those experiencing chronic homelessness with 20.0% (3 of 15) receiving group-based vocational intervention only finding employment compared to 51.9%, (14 of 27) in the group-based vocational intervention plus modified IPS.

### **Housing Results**

Overall, being enrolled in the group-based vocational intervention plus modified IPS did not directly result in improved housing outcomes. At six months, 13 (52.0%) of those in the group-based vocational intervention alone were no longer homeless compared to 22 (57.9%) of those in the group-based vocational intervention plus modified IPS. This difference is not statistically significant. However, employment was a strong predictor of housing at six months. Nineteen of the overall 27 (70.4%) Veterans employed had housing at six months compared to 16 of the overall 36 (44.4%) Veterans who did not find employment. This difference is also not statistically significant.

Overall, the combination of group-based vocational intervention and modified IPS demonstrated effectiveness in facilitating employment compared to group-based vocational intervention alone, but the inclusion of modified IPS was not sufficient to directly improve housing outcomes in the current sample. What the evaluation of housing does show is the importance of employment on exiting homelessness for Veterans with histories of incarceration and mental illness and/or substance use disorder and logically suggests that programs which facilitate employment may lead to improved housing outcomes.

Table. Percent of Veterans with histories of prison incarceration, experiencing homelessness at the time of study enrollment, and mental illness and/or substance use disorder who found employment within 6 months of participating in a group-based vocational intervention alone compared to group-based vocational intervention plus modified IPS.



## References

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