



RESEARCH BRIEF

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Housing Outcomes of Veterans Following Exit from the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program

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BACKGROUND

Recent years have seen a shift in homeless assistance policy in the United States towards an emphasis on homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing programs. This shift was embodied by the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) which, as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, provided \$1.5 billion for financial assistance and services to prevent at-risk households from becoming homeless and to move households experiencing homelessness into permanent housing as quickly as possible. In line with this changing focus, and drawing on lessons learned from the implementation of HPRP, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) launched its own homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing initiative, the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program, beginning in federal fiscal year (FY) 2012. SSVF funds community-based non-profit organizations to provide homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing services to Veteran households and has become an integral component of the VA's strategy to prevent and end homelessness among Veterans. In its first year of operation, 85 SSVF grantees provided assistance to approximately 21,100 Veteran households. The program expanded to 151 grantees for FY 2013, and the number of Veteran households receiving assistance through SSVF will continue to grow during FY 2014, as the program is currently being administered by 319 grantees located in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

To improve the effectiveness of the SSVF program, researchers at the National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans are engaged in ongoing evaluation and analysis of the outcomes of Veteran households served by the SSVF program. This research brief reports preliminary findings from this work and focuses on the housing outcomes of Veterans who exited SSVF during FY 2012, which was the first year of the program's operation.

DATA AND METHODS

The analysis presented here used data collected by the SSVF program and by HOMES, which is an administrative database that tracks utilization of VA specialized homeless programs, to assess the housing outcomes of Veterans served by SSVF following their exit from the program. The evaluation cohort was comprised of all Veterans who exited the SSVF program during fiscal year 2012 (i.e. between October 1, 2011 and September 30, 2012). Veterans were excluded from the cohort if they had missing/invalid Social Security numbers or if their housing status at entry into the SSVF program was unknown. The resulting cohort of 12,259 Veterans was stratified into four sub-groups, based on household type (single Veterans vs. Veterans in families)¹ and SSVF service category (i.e. prevention vs. rapid re-housing).

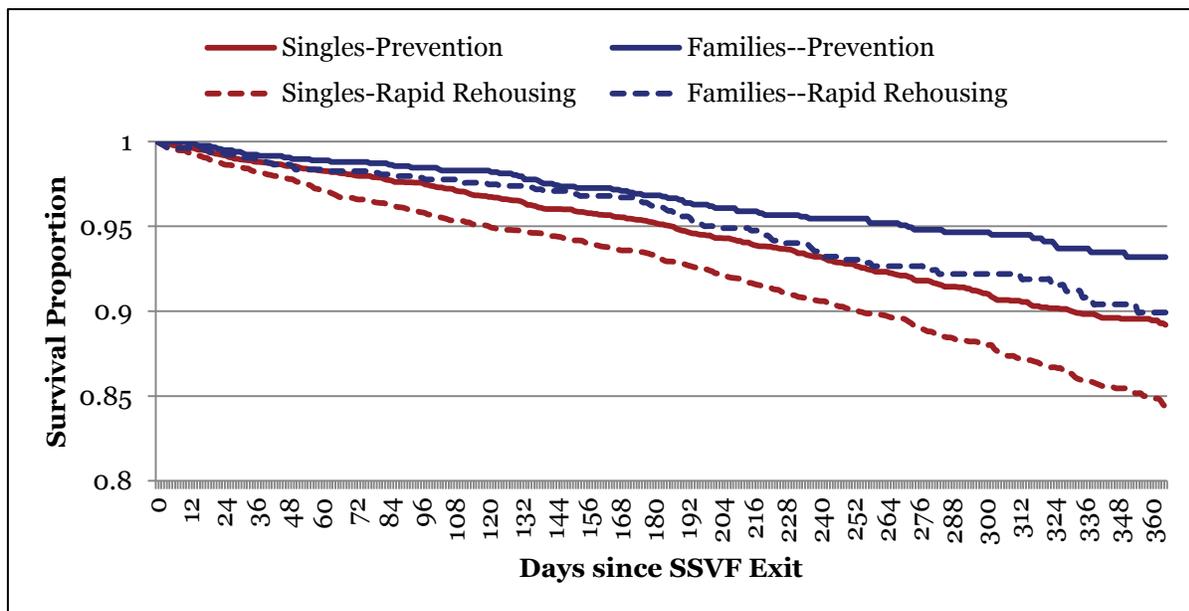
Promoting data-driven, evidence-based solutions to end Veteran homelessness

These four groups were tracked prospectively to examine the timing and occurrence of episodes of homelessness subsequent to their SSVF exit date. A homeless episode included any of the following: 1) A record of completion of a HOMES assessment form; 2) A record of entry into a VA specialized homeless program; 3) A record of SSVF rapid re-housing services. Veterans were followed from their date of exit until either the occurrence of their first episode of homelessness or March 31, 2013. The maximum follow up time was roughly 18 months (544 days). Survival analysis, which is a set of statistical methods well-suited for examining the type of longitudinal time-to-event data under consideration here, was used to examine episodes of homelessness over time and to assess the relationship between Veteran and program level factors and the risk of experiencing an episode of homelessness following SSVF exit. Veterans were excluded from the analysis of post-SSVF homeless episodes if they were among the small minority (roughly 10%) of SSVF participants identified as exiting the program to a homeless destination or an institution.

RESULTS

Figure 1 presents Kaplan-Meier survival curves for Veterans who received SSVF services, stratified by household and service type.

Figure 1—Kaplan-Meier survival curves for homeless episodes following SSVF exit



The survival curves plot the proportion of Veterans who did not experience an episode of homelessness over time following their exit from SSVF. As such, the inverse of the survival curve represents the proportion of those in the study cohort identified as having had episode of homelessness over time. At one year following exit from the SSVF program, roughly 11% of single Veteran SSVF prevention participants and 7% of Veterans who received SSVF prevention services as part of a household with children had experienced an episode of homelessness. Put differently, the overwhelming majority of single Veterans (89%) and Veterans in families (93%) who received SSVF prevention services did not use VA homeless services within a year subsequent to their exit from the SSVF program. The results are similar to Veterans who received rapid re-housing services, with approximately 16% of single Veterans and 10% of Veterans in families identified as having

had an episode of homelessness over the one-year period subsequent to their exit from SSVF. As Veterans who received SSVF rapid re-housing services were homeless at their time of entry into the program, it is not surprising that their rates of homelessness were slightly higher than their counterparts who received prevention services and who were housed at entry into SSVF.

Cox proportional hazards regression models were used to assess the association between individual and program level factors and the risk of experiencing an episode of homelessness after exiting the SSVF program. Separate models were estimated for each of the four sub-groups, and the results of these models are shown in Table 1. The table presents hazard ratios, which describe the relationship between each individual/program factor and the risk of having a homeless episode subsequent to exiting SSVF. Hazard ratios greater than one indicate increased risk, while hazard ratios less than one indicate decreased risk.

Key findings from the models include:

- For single Veterans, the risk of experiencing a homeless episode following SSVF exit was about 1.7 times higher those who had a prior history of homelessness, regardless of whether they received prevention or rapid re-housing services.
- Among Veterans in families who received rapid re-housing services, the risk of experiencing a homeless episode after leaving SSVF was 2.7 greater for those with a disabling condition .
- There was no significant relationship between income level at the time of entry into the SSVF program and the risk of experiencing an episode of homelessness following program exit among any of the four household/ service type sub-groups.
- For both single Veterans and Veterans in families who received rapid re-housing, those whose participation in the program lasted longer than 90 days were at an increased risk of having an episode of homelessness upon exiting SSVF.
- There were few significant associations between SSVF service types and risk of a homeless episode following SSVF exit. Among single Veterans receiving rapid re-housing services, receipt of rental assistance was positively associated with risk of homelessness and receipt of any type financial assistance negatively associated with risk of homelessness. For Veterans in families who received rapid re-housing, those who got assistance with utility payments were more likely to have a homeless episode subsequent to their SSVF exit.
- Veterans who exited SSVF to the HUD-VASH program, a permanent supportive housing program for Veterans, or other permanent destinations (for singles only) had a much lower risk of a homeless episode than Veterans who exited to temporary housing arrangements with family members or friends.
- Veterans in families who received prevention services in the South and West and rapid re-housing services in the Midwest were less likely than those who received these services in the Northeast to have experienced an episode of homelessness after exiting SSVF.

DISCUSSION

The findings presented in this brief indicate that the vast majority of Veterans who received assistance from the SSVF program did not experience an episode of homelessness subsequent to their exit from SSVF, at least as far as is possible to determine using VA data sources. These findings are encouraging in that they suggest that the large majority of Veterans who receive SSVF assistance in either preserving their housing (in the case of prevention) or in obtaining housing (in the case of rapid re-housing) remain housed after they are no longer receiving SSVF assistance.

Table 1—Results of regression models of relationship between Veteran and program level factors and risk of homeless episode following SSVF exit

	Veteran Singles		Veterans in Families	
	Prevention	Rapid Re-housing	Prevention	Rapid Re-housing
	Hazard Ratio	Hazard Ratio	Hazard Ratio	Hazard Ratio
Age (compared to 18-30 years)				
30-44	1.62	1.74*	0.78	1.59
44-54	2.45**	1.71*	0.54	2.71*
54-61	1.76	1.37	0.64	4.04**
62+	1.12	1.18	0.00	0.00
Male	1.15	1.20	0.63	0.89
Hispanic	0.91	0.76	0.64	0.63
Race (compared to whites)				
Black	1.17	1.13	0.97	0.88
Other	1.14	1.19	1.45	0.47
Disabling Condition	0.99	1.08	1.20	2.67**
# of Children (compared to 1 child)				
2 Children	--	--	0.58	0.91
3+ Children	--	--	1.35	0.55
History of homelessness	1.67**	1.68***	1.85	1.17
Monthly income (compared to <\$500)				
\$500-\$1000	0.88	0.79	0.83	0.90
\$1001-\$1500	1.31	0.83	1.00	0.83
\$1501-\$2000	1.25	1.24	1.05	0.68
\$2500+	0.80	1.09	0.84	1.18
Participation length >90 days	1.12	1.32**	1.32	1.90*
Legal Services	0.33	0.60	2.37	1.09
Health/Behavioral health services	0.29	0.47	0.00	0.00
Housing placement/search services	1.00	1.11	0.67	0.49
Rental assistance	1.47	1.66**	1.43	1.45
Security Deposit	0.96	0.98	1.90	0.90
Utility Payments	1.05	0.90	1.22	2.54**
Moving Costs	0.68	1.28	1.59	0.34
Any temp. financial assistance	0.78	0.62*	0.66	0.40
Exit destination (compared to temporary with family/friends)				
VASH	0.21***	0.21***	0.50	0.20**
Other Permanent	0.37***	0.48***	0.69	0.58
Other unknown	0.70	0.74	0.00	1.41
Region (compared to Northeast)				
South	0.96	0.94	0.44*	0.44
Midwest	1.19	1.28	0.51	0.20*
West	1.25	1.04	0.31*	0.82

* - p < .05; ** - p < .01; *** - p < .001

Although they are encouraging, it is necessary to note three factors that add important context to these findings. First, this analysis did not include a comparison group of Veterans who had similar housing problems as SSVF recipients but who did not receive SSVF. As such, it is not possible from the analysis presented here to determine what is likely to have happened to SSVF recipients had they not received SSVF. Consequently, it is not possible to determine with any certainty whether SSVF was truly responsible for the observed low rates of homelessness following SSVF. Second, the substantial number of Veterans transitioning from SSVF to HUD-VASH (roughly one third of singles and one quarter of families), likely contributed to the low rates of post-SSVF homelessness and, indeed, Veterans who exited SSVF to HUD-VASH were far less likely to have a homeless episode after leaving SSVF. Third, the analysis only included episodes of homelessness that resulted from use of VA specialized homeless programs and therefore did not identify Veterans who used mainstream homeless assistance programs or who were homeless in unsheltered locations. Consequently, the present findings likely underestimate the extent to which Veterans served by the SSVF program subsequently become homeless.

These factors notwithstanding, the findings are nonetheless promising for the potential for the SSVF program to continue to help make substantial gains in preventing and ending homelessness among Veterans through the provision of time-limited assistance. In addition, the results of the regression models have some meaningful implications for the SSVF program moving forward. First, it is noteworthy that there was no relationship between income level and the likelihood of experiencing an episode of homelessness after exiting SSVF. This finding suggests that Veteran households of all income levels, including those with extremely low incomes, can be equally successful in maintaining or obtaining residential stability with the type of short-term assistance provided by SSVF. Second, the overall lack of a consistent pattern of findings with respect to the variables measuring receipt of various types of SSVF services may suggest that the program's approach of tailoring services to meet the unique needs of Veterans rather than relying on a uniform service package is a successful one. However, the positive relationship between rental assistance and utility payments and risk of having a homeless episode was unexpected, and the findings related to SSVF service types may also be due to other factors including the fact that these service type indicators did not capture the intensity of services provided. In either case, the relationship between the volume and type of services provided by SSVF and housing outcomes merits closer attention in future analysis. Finally, findings in the family models of a relationship between geographic region and housing outcomes may indicate that community-level factors, such as housing market and economic conditions or gaps in the availability of mainstream services, have an impact on the success of the SSVF program. Arriving at a better understanding of the interaction between SSVF program factors and community characteristics will be useful in terms of refining the program such that program activities are appropriately aligned with local conditions.

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Opinions expressed in this research brief represent only the position of the National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

¹ For the purposes of this brief "single" Veterans includes all Veterans who, did not receive SSVF services as part of a family with children under the age of 18. In practice, "single" Veterans may have been part of a household with multiple adults.