**RESEARCH SUMMARY**

# Employment and Vocational Rehabilitation Experiences among Veterans with Polytrauma/Traumatic Brain Injury History

## A Quick Look

This study utilized qualitative interviews and focus groups with veterans with documented polytrauma/TBI history to explore veterans’ perceived barriers to employment and vocational rehabilitation program participation, as well as to solicit thoughts regarding interest in an evidence-based vocational rehabilitation program, the Individual Placement and Support model of Supported Employment (IPS-SE).

## Key Findings

* Veterans identified physical, emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal barriers to finding and maintaining work that they described as linked with their polytrauma/TBI symptoms and sequelae.
* Communication and logistical issues were described as the primary barriers to vocational rehabilitation program access, while barriers to program utilization included eligibility characteristics, fear of losing financial benefits, and a military-cultural belief of self-sufficiency that made help-seeking difficult.
* Veterans endorsed key aspects such as staff serving as translators, advocates, and navigators of the job search and maintenance process.
* Veterans with deployment-related polytrauma/TBI history identified perceived individual and system challenges to seeking and maintaining civilian employment, and accessing and benefiting from VA vocational rehabilitation programs.
* Participants were consistent in describing physical and cognitive impediments to finding civilian employment, and emotional and interactional challenges to maintaining and flourishing in that work.
* Communication and logistical issues acted as primary barriers to program access
* Participants suggest that a vocational rehabilitation specialist integrated within the VA Polytrauma/TBI team could play an important facilitating role

## Putting It Into Practice

* The integration of clinical and vocational rehabilitation teams allows for veteran health and vocational needs to be addressed concurrently and ultimately increasing the likelihood that veterans will regain productive, meaningful work.
* Many participants described a difficult transition moving from the military to the civilian workforce.
* Veterans described both individual-level and interpersonal barriers that impeded their ability to succeed in the civilian workforce
* Veterans described encountering employers with negative preconceptions and fears about veterans, which participants believed prevented them from being hired.
* Participants also found that employers, unfamiliar with military work, had difficulty translating military experiences into civilian job skills, which could mean that veterans' competencies were undervalued

## Learn More

* Veterans with documented, deployment-related TBI history participated in individual interviews or focus groups
* Five focus groups and 10 individual interviews were conducted with a total of 37 veterans.
* Pogoda TK, Carlson KF, Gormley KE, Resnick SG (2017a). Supported employment for veterans with traumatic brain injury: Provider perspectives. Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, 99(2), S14-S22. [PubMed: 28784357]
* Resnick SG, Rosenheck RA, Drebing CE (2006). What makes vocational rehabilitation effective? Program characteristics

## Source

Wyse, J. J., Pogoda, T. K., Mastarone, G. L., Gilbert, T., & Carlson, K. F. (2020). Employment and vocational rehabilitation experiences among veterans with polytrauma/traumatic brain injury history. Psychological services, 17(1), 65–74. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ser0000283>

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