

Effective Vocational Rehabilitation Services for Military Veterans

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RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS:

- U.S. federal and state partnerships have provided veterans with disabilities with VR services for almost 100 years. Due to the recent long-term conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, there is an increasing need for research specific to veterans' vocational training after deployment, especially for those with service-connected disabilities.
- Although there are multiple VR-related programs made available by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), many veterans are unaware of these services or may not seek out VR programs despite being aware of them. Previous research has also shown that veterans who accessed VR services were five times more likely to find employment, compared to veterans who did not make use of these services.
- Few studies have focused on the effectiveness of VR services, specifically in relation to college training for veterans with disabilities seeking competitive employment. In this study, researchers found that veterans with college and university training were more likely to become employed when they also received job search assistance and job placement assistance. Veterans without college and university training increased their probability of employment after receiving diagnosis and treatment of impairments, VR counseling, job placement assistance, rehabilitation technology and other supports.

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ABSTRACT:

“The objective of this study was to identify VR services related to competitive employment for eligible consumers of the state VR program from two distinct groups: veterans who received college and university training and veterans who did not receive such training. A hierarchical logistical regression analysis was used on cases from the Rehabilitation Services Administration 911 database for fiscal year 2008 to test for such relationships. A total of eight services were found related to employment for veterans who did not receive college training but only two services related to employment for veterans who received college training. Service needs of veterans differed based on their college training status. Implications of the findings and recommendations will be discussed for rehabilitation counseling professionals working with veterans with disabilities.”

Implications

FOR PRACTICE

The results of this study provide important information for rehabilitation counselors, vocational counselors and other practitioners working with veterans with disabilities. Even veterans without a desire or eligibility to obtain university training were able to benefit from receiving diagnoses and treatments for impairments, so practitioners should make diagnoses and treatments of veterans' impairments a goal in the rehabilitation process regardless of their personal goals. Also, some treatments may be more beneficial than others, as shown by medical and vocational data, so practitioners should become familiar with that data to enable them to recommend required or beneficial treatments. Rehabilitation counselors should also integrate rehabilitation technology services into their practice, especially for veterans not receiving college training, as this technology helps veterans to overcome educational, employment and transportation barriers, among others. Veterans with college training are able to benefit from job search assistance, so state VR plans should include a component that focuses on enhancing resume development and teaches interviewing and networking skills to those receiving college or university training. For veterans without college training, rehabilitation counselors should provide an extensive set of services that provide skills and information appropriate to their specific career goals. The success of VR services depends on careful, detailed assessment of the needs and goals of individual veterans by experienced and competent practitioners.

FOR POLICY

Because VR services are so beneficial to veterans with disabilities, policy makers should work to support and expand state VR programs to reach a wider population of veterans. Many VR services are more helpful to veterans without college training, including diagnosis and treatment of impairments, counseling and guidance, and rehabilitation technology. For veterans with disabilities who received college training, only job search assistance and job placement were positively correlated with vocational outcomes. Policy makers may wish to establish two forms of VR services, a class specifically for veterans without college training and another for those who attended college. Job placement assistance was found to be beneficial for veterans regardless of whether or not they had college training, so this could be included in both forms of VR services. Veterans without college training benefited specifically from rehabilitation technology training, so rehabilitation technology can be emphasized for those without a college or university background. Policy makers should also establish policies providing financial and social assistance for veterans to receive diagnosis and treatment of impairments upon enrolling in VR programs, as these treatments are not only beneficial to veterans in terms of gaining employment, but are especially relevant to younger veterans who have high rates of injuries to the extremities and traumatic brain injuries.

FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

There is a need for more extensive research about veterans with disabilities who participate in state VR programs, especially focusing on the mechanisms through which veterans gain employment, and the contributions of rehabilitation technology services. In future studies, researchers should go beyond whether or not technology services were received, performing more in-depth analysis of how the various components of rehabilitation technology affect the outcomes of veterans enrolled in VR programs. Future studies should also focus on identifying the range of specific treatment needs for veterans with disabilities, as knowledge of specific treatments that are needed can help practitioners and administrators in designing and estimating potential program costs. Researchers should also explore whether veterans' service needs vary based on whether or not they are enrolled in higher education programs, as well as counselor characteristics. Veterans with more competent counselors could be more likely to obtain employment, as well as those with counselors who were more experienced or more knowledgeable of veteran-specific issues. Researchers can also develop multiple outcome measures in future studies to determine whether VR services are useful for veterans with disabilities for more than obtaining employment. Finally, a random, nationally-representative sample would be useful in future studies, as the participants in this study were drawn from a limited convenience sample of consumers who used a VR program or service.

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