

Effectiveness of Peer Mentorship With Veterans Experiencing Homelessness: Implications for OT Practice

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DOI: [10.5014/ajot.2024.78S2-PO194](https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2024.78S2-PO194)

Date presented: March 21, 24

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Homeless veterans represent a vulnerable population with difficulty accessing needed services and participating in desired occupations. Despite transitional housing programs, return to homelessness can occur because of substance abuse, failure to pay rent, mental health challenges, and social isolation (Homeless Policy Research Institute, 2018). Peer mentorship, an emerging area, is designed to aid mental health, increase socialization, and provide resources (Van Voorhees et al., 2019). OT practitioners can learn from peer mentors to support occupational needs of veterans or similar populations (Schultz-Krohn & Tyminski, 2018). The purpose of this study is to understand how peer mentorship impacts recurrence of homelessness among veterans from the perspective of mentors. This phenomenological study involved in-depth interviews of three veteran peer mentors recruited by purposive sampling from organizations serving veterans. Participants were required to speak English and meet one criteria: veteran, homeless, similar age to veterans served, or had a mental health diagnosis. Interviews involved nine semi-structured questions about roles and responsibilities, program design, and skills used to reduce recurrence of homelessness. Questions were adapted from previous literature on peer mentorship programs for veterans. Probing was used to obtain clarification or further understanding of a response. Through inductive coding, constant comparison analysis and member checking, five themes emerged. Themes regarding perceived facilitators to independent living included interpersonal skill development, connection through experience and connection to resources. Themes regarding perceived barriers to independent living included veterans' life circumstances and poor coping skills. These findings regarding effectiveness of peer mentoring programs can guide OT practitioners who conduct need assessments and provide resources to support occupational engagement and reduce homelessness.

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