

Veterans' Perceptions on Mental Health Resources Available Through the Veterans Association

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Introduction

- Veterans are at risk for homelessness because they have difficulty reintegrating into civilian life after service and greater prevalence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)¹
- Mental health resources have been identified as a way to reduce homelessness among veterans²
- Veterans' knowledge and perceptions about these resources can impact their ability and willingness to access them when needed



Source: Getty Images

Objective

This study examined veterans' knowledge about mental health resources through the VA and their perception of whether these resources can prevent homelessness.



Source: Getty Images

Methodology

- From April 2020 – May 2020, 52 U.S. Veterans from across the United States took an online survey regarding their awareness of mental health services provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).
- Eligibility criteria included United States Veterans ages 18 and older.
- Participants were recruited online via veteran Facebook groups and Reddit veteran communities as well as through word-of-mouth
- The survey was approved by an institutional review board (IRB) at the University of California, San Diego
- Separate Chi-Square bivariate regression analyses were used on characteristics to identify potential relationships with veteran awareness of four separate mental health resources provided by the VA
- Veteran perceptions on barriers to access and veteran beliefs on the ability of VA provided resources to prevent homelessness were also identified
- Analyses were performed on SPSS statistical software

Results

- A significant number of veterans (96.2%) are aware of the mental health resources that the VA offers.
- Veterans were most familiar with the call-center for mental health and Military OneSource (Figure 1)
- Veterans were less familiar with the Psychological Health Resource Center and the Community Mental Health Point of Contact Locator (Figure 1)
- Veterans identified stigma as the main barrier to accessing mental health resources, followed by transportation (Figure 2).

Results

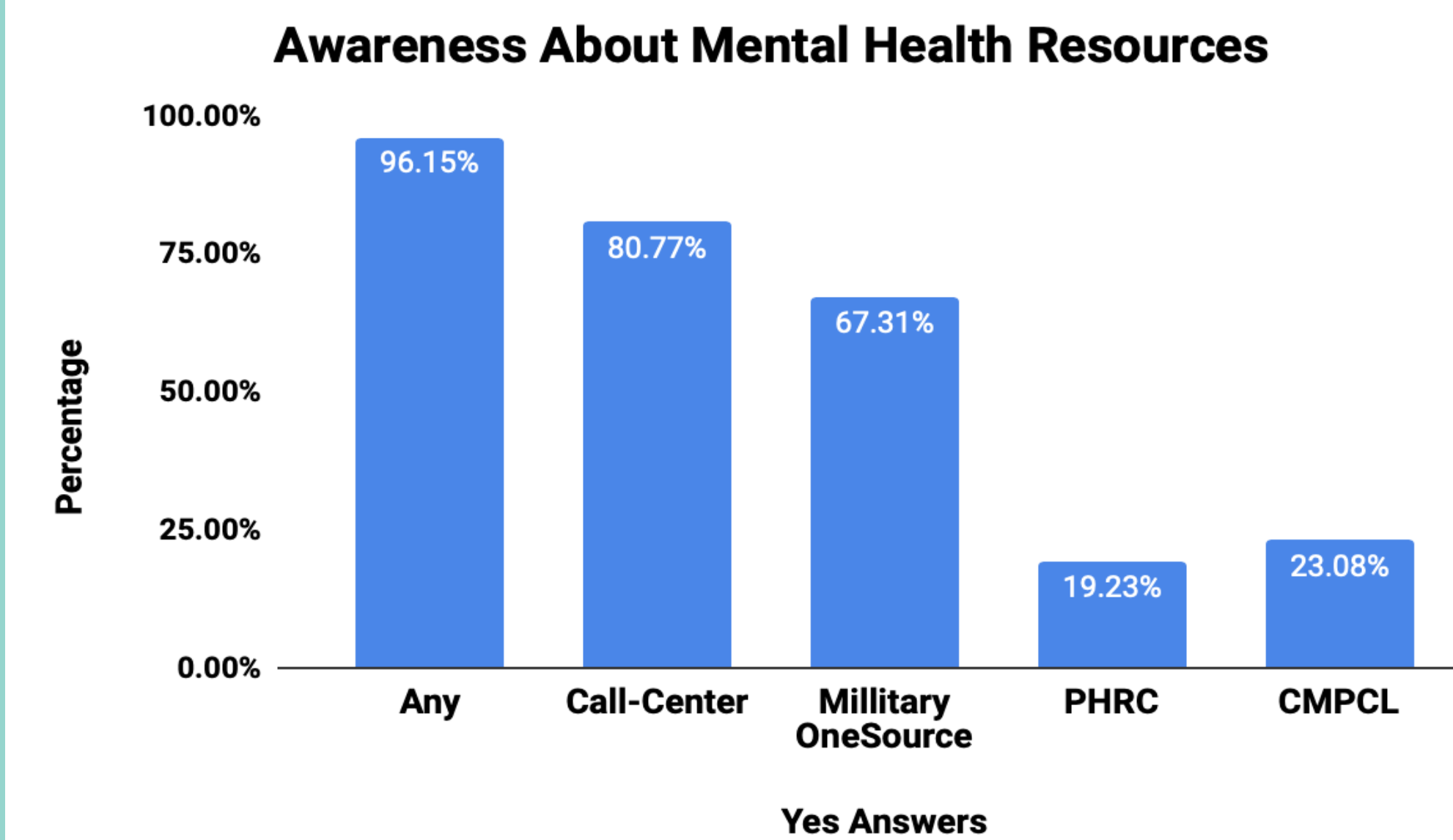


Figure 1: Percent of respondents who answered yes vs no to the question "Have you ever heard of [resource]"

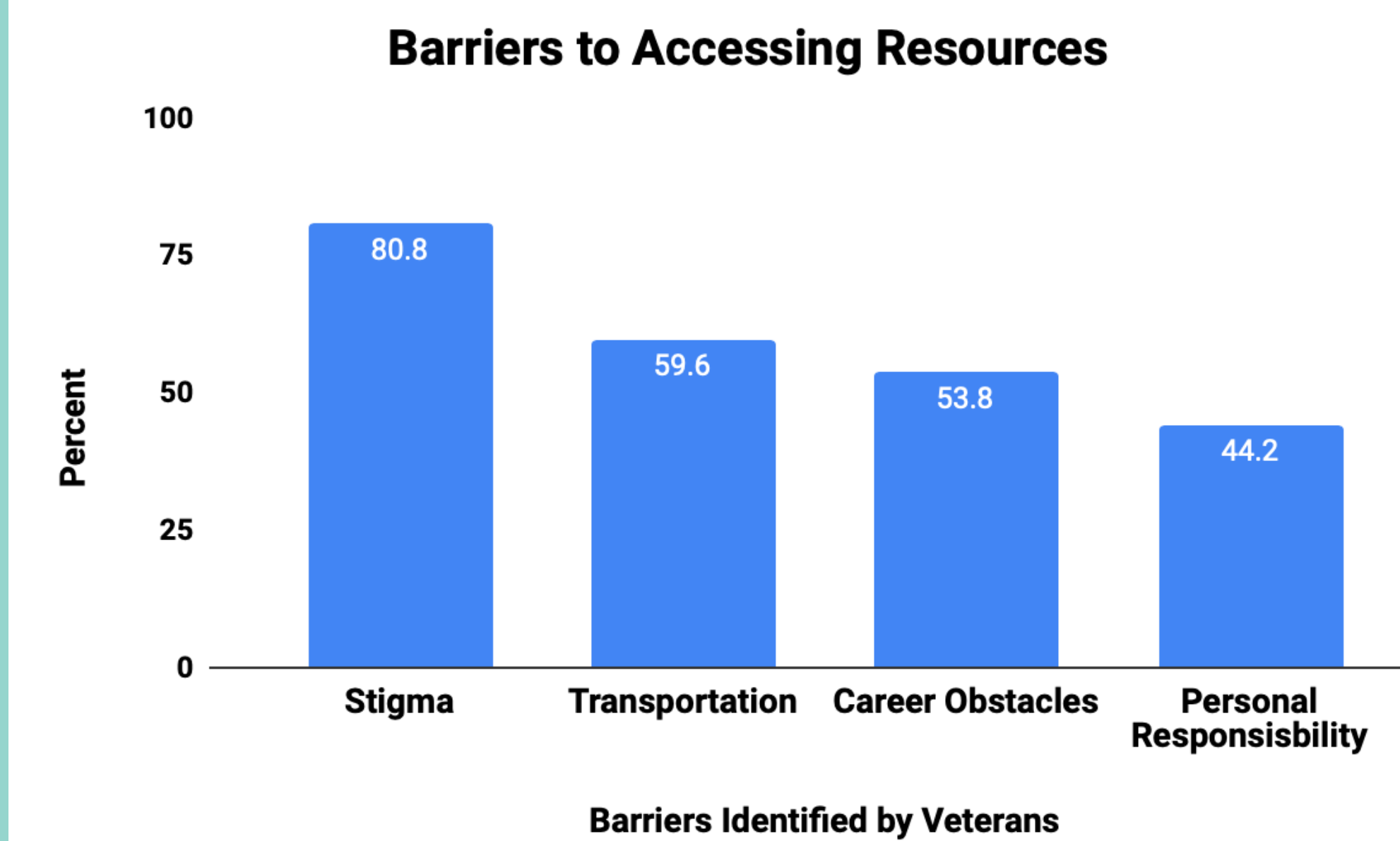


Figure 2: Percent of veterans who felt that each barrier prevented access to mental health resources. Veterans could choose multiple barriers.

- There was no correlation found between years as a veteran ($p=0.323$) or sexual orientation ($p=0.297$) and knowledge about mental health resources.
- 76.9% of surveyed veterans believe that access to mental health resources through the VA could help prevent homelessness.



Source: VA Services

FIGHTING



Source: United States Department of Veterans Affairs

Conclusion

- Our findings suggest that stigma is a barrier to accessing mental health resources for veterans, but years as a veteran and sexual orientation do not impact awareness of resources.
- Many veterans in our sample believe that mental health resources may help prevent homelessness.
- Compared to resources that provide long-term support such as the Psychological Health Resource Center and the Community Mental Health Point of Contact Locator, veterans were most familiar with immediate care resources such as the call-center for mental health and Military OneSource.
- The VA should implement policies that reduce stigma around mental illness and expand availability of resources, as well as transportation services

References

1. "Veteran Homelessness." *National Alliance to End Homelessness*, 13 Nov. 2019, endhomelessness.org/resource/veteran-homelessness/.
2. Suris, Alina, et al. "Development and Implementation of a Homeless Mobile Medical/Mental Veteran Intervention." *Federal Practitioner*, Frontline Medical Communications Inc., Sept. 2017, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6370453/.