

## Helping Homeless Veterans Find Employment and Pay Child Support: A Program Evaluation of a Pilot Collaboration

Fred Brooks<sup>1</sup>, Robin Hartinger-Saunders<sup>2</sup> & Rorie Scurlock<sup>3</sup>

### Abstract

---

**Objective:** This research evaluates the effectiveness of a pilot collaboration in Georgia (USA) designed to help homeless veterans, with open child support cases, locate employment, find permanent housing, resolve legal issues, and begin making child support payments. **Method:** The study employed a single group pretest posttest research design (n= 45). Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from all 45 participants enrolled in the study. **Results:** Between baseline and posttest, mean monthly child support payments increased 47% (\$55 to \$81). While child support payments improved, they remained well below the \$396 mean monthly amount owed. Sixty-nine percent of the sample remained unemployed at posttest and presented with major barriers to employment. Half of focus group respondents reported improved housing conditions over the course of the study. While a few veterans reported progress on resolving legal issues, the majority had extant legal issues at the end of the study. **Conclusions:** While a majority of focus group participants felt their lives had improved, stronger interventions tailored to help participants overcome multiple, complex barriers to employment will be necessary to help homeless veterans secure living wage employment and make substantial child support payments.

---

**Keywords:** veterans, homelessness, child support payments, employment programs

### 1. Introduction

In 2009, President Obama and Veterans Administration (VA) Secretary Eric Shinseki announced a goal to end homelessness among veterans by the end of 2015.

---

<sup>1</sup>Georgia State University, School of Social Work, P.O. Box 3995, Atlanta, Georgia 30302-3995, USA. Email: [fbrooks2@gsu.edu](mailto:fbrooks2@gsu.edu), Phone: 404-413-1059, fax 404-413-1075

<sup>2</sup>Georgia State University, School of Social Work, P.O. Box 3995, Atlanta, Georgia 30302-3995.

<sup>3</sup>United Way of Greater Atlanta, 100 Edgewood Ave. NE, Atlanta, GA 30303

The VA is working to meet that goal through the Homeless Veterans Outreach Initiative designed to address multiple issues that can cause a veteran to become homeless including poverty, lack of social support, mental health and substance abuse issues and lack of job training (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013). Through this initiative the Federal VA encouraged local VA offices to collaborate with state agencies and non-profits to help homeless veterans secure housing, recover from alcohol and substance abuse, find employment, and otherwise stabilize their lives. In Atlanta Georgia, during the summer of 2010, VA's Healthcare for Homeless Veterans (HCHV), the Fatherhood Program (FP) under the state agency Division of Child Support Services (DCSS), and the non-profit Georgia Law Center for the Homeless (GLCH) formed a collaboration to help homeless veterans with these issues. Each agency in the collaborative had specific issues to address— HCHV: housing, substance abuse, mental and physical health; FP: employment, job training and paying child support; GLCH: legal issues. Funded by a small grant from Georgia's Division of Child Support Services, the current study was only able to collect baseline and posttest data on two key outcome variables: employment status and child support payments. While it was beyond the scope of this study to collect pre and posttest data on the variables housing, barriers to employment, legal issues, and relationships with children; descriptive data from intake assessment forms and focus groups were used to assess participant perception of progress in these areas and what participants perceived as strengths and weaknesses of the pilot program.

## **2. Literature Review**

In March 2009, President Barack Obama stated, "Too many wounded warriors go without the care that they need. Too many veterans don't receive the support that they've earned. Too many who once wore our nation's uniform now sleep in our nation's streets" (The White House). The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) shared in his sentiments declaring that even one veteran without safe and stable housing is one too many.

In 2009, national estimates from the Point in Time count indicated that the over representation of veterans in the homeless population has become a national trend. A report issued by The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs revealed that there are 62,619 homeless veterans (2013a). At the time of the count, veterans represented eight percent of the total U.S. population, and 12% of the total homeless population nationally.

## 2.1 Homeless Veterans in Georgia

The state of Georgia accounts for four percent of the total homeless veteran population, the fifth-highest ranking in the nation (Abt Associates, Inc. & U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2009). In Metro Atlanta, the Tri-Jurisdictional (Tri-J) Collaborative on Homelessness coordinates a homeless survey and census every other year. Tri-J includes the City of Atlanta, DeKalb and Fulton counties along with Pathways Community Network (a Homeless Management Information System or HMIS). Data from the 2011 homeless survey and census count indicated there were 6,838 homeless on the night of the census. Of those surveyed 18% were veterans, compared to seven percent of the Fulton County population, with an average of three years in the military (Parker, 2011). Forty percent had not worked a single day in 2010.

## 2.2 Homelessness Among Veterans: Contributing Factors

Many factors contribute to veterans becoming homeless including substance abuse, mental health issues (e.g., major depression), Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and, Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI) (Berenson, 2011). In addition, veterans and their families experience unique challenges by virtue of serving in the military (e.g. transience, absent caregivers). The culmination of these factors contribute to unemployment, under employment, financial and housing instability. For veterans who are noncustodial parents, financial instability directly effects their children as it impacts their ability to meet their child support obligations. As a result, veterans experience subsequent barriers to obtaining employment and housing because of their mounting child support debt. Failure to pay child support can lead to a suspended drivers' license and contribute to bad credit, making it difficult to obtain the employment and housing necessary to make payments towards their child support obligations (Berenson, 2011).

### Child Support

## 2.3 Debt by Noncustodial Veterans

Seven percent of the total national child support debt (over \$7 billion dollars) is owed by veterans who are noncustodial parents (Office of Child Support Enforcement, 2011a).

The average debt owed by all noncustodial parents is \$19,200 compared to about \$24,500 for noncustodial veteran parents (Office of Child Support Enforcement, 2011a).

The incongruity in child support debt among all noncustodial parents and noncustodial veterans may be explained by the age difference between noncustodial parents and noncustodial veterans. Fifty percent of veterans in the caseload are over 50, while only 14 percent of noncustodial parents in the caseload are over fifty. In addition, the homeless veteran population is much more transient, making it difficult to provide assistance; as high as 44% of veterans who receive benefits live in a different state than where their child support case originated (Office of Child Support Enforcement, 2011a).

#### 2.4 Child Support Programs

*The Georgia Fatherhood Program (GFP).* In 1997, the Division of Child Support Services (DCSS) created GFP, which became the largest state-operated fatherhood program in the country. The program was initiated to work with non-custodial parents who owe child support but, are unable to pay. The program addresses common barriers to paying child support including little or no education, lack of employment, a criminal background, lack of transportation and, no driver's license (Division of Child Support Services, 2012). The GFP assists non-custodial parents with obtaining employment by providing life skills training, vocational training and job placement services (Bloomer & Sipe, 2003).

Bloomer and Sipe (2003) examined whether the Georgia Fatherhood Program (GFP) had an impact on employment status and improved wages. They found that the program was beneficial to unemployed men who were actively seeking employment. However, the program did not improve wages for those already employed.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study was conducted between August 2010 and December 2011. The research protocol was approved by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at Georgia State University.

For the two primary outcome variables (employment and child support payments) the study used a pre-experimental, single group, pretest-posttest research design.

Data for the study were obtained from four sources: (1) the Fatherhood Intake and Assessment Forms, (2) focus groups (two) held with a total of 8 veterans, (3) Georgia's child support payment data base called STARS and, (4) interviews with key program personnel from each collaborative partner (this included a Supervisor at HCHV, the two Fatherhood agents assigned to this pilot collaboration and the attorney from GLCH assigned to this project). The PI also attended one orientation session and two of the weekly meetings between fatherhood agents and unemployed participants.

### 3.2 Sample, Selection Process, and Collaborative Intervention

The sample was comprised of homeless veterans (n=45) who agreed to participate in the pilot project. They were enrolled in the program via referrals from the VA's Health Care for Homeless Veteran's program (HCHV). Eligibility criteria for HCHV included meeting the general criteria for VA assistance, being homeless, and having a diagnosis for mental health, substance and/or alcohol treatment services. If a veteran met the above criteria and had an open child support payment case his/her HCHV Case Manager described the Georgia Fatherhood Program and the collaboration designed to help veterans find jobs, resolve legal issues, and pay child support. Veterans were told that participating in the collaboration with Fatherhood was voluntary. HCHV case managers did not record how many veterans qualified for the program but declined to participate (this weakness and its implications will be addressed in the Discussion Section). Officials in the Fatherhood program believed more veterans qualified for the program compared to the number that agreed to participate, but with no statistical records this assumption was never empirically supported. If a veteran agreed to participate they were asked to complete the Fatherhood Program's Intake & Assessment form and were referred to the Fatherhood Program (which was housed in a building adjacent to the HCHV building).

The Fatherhood program organized a monthly orientation exclusively for participants in the pilot program.

One of the fatherhood agents showed participants a powerpoint show and explained the Fatherhood Program. Veterans were told the program was voluntary and they did not have to participate. Those that agreed to participate were assigned a Fatherhood Agent (one of two working in the East Point office). A lawyer from GLCH was present at the orientation sessions and she described the eligibility criteria and services offered by the Ga. Law Center for the Homeless.

If participants were eligible and had issues GLCH could work on she set up appointments with participants.

Fatherhood Agents provided both one-on-one and group counseling sessions primarily around employment, barriers to employment, and child support issues. This role included case management and referrals to various agencies depending on the issue. As long as a veteran was unemployed he/she was required to attend a weekly group meeting that typically included a workshop/discussion on job readiness skills (resume writing, interviewing skills, etc.) and sharing job leads with participants. The Fatherhood Program had partnerships with some job training organizations (e.g., training to obtain a Commercial Driver's License, or fork-lift operator), and would refer interested participants to these training programs. Compliance was defined as attending the weekly meetings and maintaining regular communication with your assigned Fatherhood Agent. As long as participants were compliant with the Fatherhood Program, their Driver's License would not be suspended (or would be reinstated) for lack of child support payments. The program also had the authority to halt court proceedings (that could lead to incarceration) against a participant who was behind on his child support payments. While the Veteran's Administration is moving towards a Housing First model, during the time of this study the Atlanta HCHV program was not following a Housing First protocol. To be eligible for transitional housing and the Veterans Assisted Supportive Housing (VASH) program a veteran had to be compliant with drug/alcohol/mental health treatment. Compliance included drug testing.

In sum, the intervention consisted of employees of all three agencies conducting their normal business-as-usual with a constituency that was recruited through HCVH. The collaboration consisted of HCHV referring homeless veterans that owed child support to the Fatherhood Program and GLCH with the goal of these two agencies assisting veterans in finding employment, paying child support and resolving legal issues. The collaboration did not include any new staff positions, job descriptions, money or new resources.

### 3.3 Hypotheses and Research Questions

Since the study only has pre and posttest data on two dependent variables we formulate the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Rates of employment will significantly improve from the pretest to the posttest. Hypothesis 2: Mean monthly child support payments will significantly improve from pretest to posttest.

The study team formulated the following research questions for the variables where we were only able to collect descriptive data from the focus groups, the intake forms, and interviews with four key stakeholders:

#### Research Questions

1. What barriers to employment did participants report?
2. What types of legal issues did veterans experience?
3. How did focus group respondents perceive changes in their housing between pre and posttests?
4. How did focus group participants perceive changes in their relationships with their children between pre and posttests?
5. What did focus group participants consider to be the most helpful and least helpful aspects of the collaboration?

#### 3.4 Measures

*Employment(pretest).* Pretest measures of employment were based on participant self-report on the Fatherhood Intake Assessment Form which was completed at the time a participant agreed to be in the program and was referred by their case manager at HCHV. Participants were asked, "are you currently employed?" Responses were dichotomous (yes or no).

*Employment (posttest).* Posttest measures were obtained by reviewing client case records (kept by their Fatherhood Agents) during November 2011 to determine whether they were currently employed. Responses were dichotomous (yes or no).

*Child support payments.* During pretest child support payments were operationally defined as the average monthly child support payment a participant made over the previous 3 months prior to him/her agreeing to be in the study. For example, if a participant joined the program in August 2010 his average monthly child support payment was calculated for all payments received by the State of Georgia May thru July 2010. The posttest for child support payments was the average monthly payment during October, November and December 2011. Child support payments were measured by accessing the official client payment records the Georgia Division of Child Support Services STARS data base. These were not self-reported, but actual money received by the Division of Child Support Services from participants. Since the STARS data based would not report monies that were not deposited into DCSS accounts this administrative data is considered highly valid and reliable.

### 3.5 Procedures

*Fatherhood Intake Assessment Form.* Participants obtained the Fatherhood Intake Assessment form from their HCHV Case Managers and completed it on their own. Once it was completed, they brought them in for the Fatherhood Program orientation.

*Focus groups.* The principal investigator conducted one focus group on November 18, 2011 and another on February 14, 2012 at the East Point office of the Fatherhood Program. Fifteen veterans were randomly selected to be called; seven agreed to be in the focus group and five veterans attended the first focus group. The second focus group was delayed due to holiday scheduling problems. Another 10 veterans were called (four numbers were out of service, one message was left) five agreed to participate and three veterans attended the final focus group.

After completing informed consent forms, participants spent the first 15 minutes filling out a questionnaire addressing the main issues to be discussed in the focus group: (e.g., barriers to employment, types of programs provided by the collaborative partners had been helpful in the areas of finding work, stabilizing housing, resolving legal issues, paying child support, and improving relations with children). Veterans were also asked what improvements they would suggest or what changes they would make if they were in charge of the pilot program. The principal investigator then led a discussion among participants of these same issues.

The focus groups were audiotaped and the written questionnaires were collected at the end of the focus group. Veterans were paid \$25 in cash to participate in the focus group.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

Child support payments were compared between baseline and posttest by using a paired sample T test. The effect size for the T-test was measured by Omega-squared (Levine, 1981). A McNemar Chi Square test was used to compare the percentages of employed veterans between pre and posttests (Huck & Cormier, 1996). Qualitative data obtained from the focus groups were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990); the most basic form of open coding elicited patterns and themes in the data. Descriptive data from the focus group was used primarily to provide more detail, depth, and explanation to the quantitative data collected from the Fatherhood Intake Assessment Form and administrative sources.



## 4. Results

### 4.1 Sample Demographics

Table 1 reports the demographic characteristics of the sample. The sample was majority black, male, middle aged, divorced, high school graduate, living in a homeless shelter and currently unemployed. While five participants reported having a job, four of the five reported they were working part-time. Forty-seven percent of the sample reported having one or more children under the age of 18, while 53% of the sample reported no children under the age of 18. While these participants did not have a current child support payment they all owed arrearages.

**Table 1: Sample Demographics**

Variable	%
<b>Race</b>	
Black	91
White	7
Other	2
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	98
Female	2
<b>Marital Status</b>	
Married	9
Divorced	57
Separated	16
Never Married	14
Widowed	4
<b>Current Housing</b>	
Homeless Shelter	58
Living Alone	16
With friends/relatives	21
Spouse	5
<b>Housing over the past 6 months</b>	
Homeless/emergency shelter	73
Half-way house	44
<b>Highest Degree Earned</b>	
Less than H.S.	10
H.S. Diploma/GED	55
AA/Technical College	19
College Diploma	16

Age	
18 to 30	0
31-50	58
51 or older	42
Currently Employed	
Yes	11
No	89
Any Employment Past 12 Months?	
None	44
Temporary	29
Part-time	15
Full-time	12
Mean Hourly Wage from Last Job	\$11.14
Annual Salary from Previous Employment	
0-\$10,000	29
10,001-25,000	47
25,001-35,000	9
35,001-45,000	12
45,001 +	3
Did Income Cover Financial Need?	
Very well	3
Fairly Well	11
Not Very Well	40
Not at All	46
Currently Have Valid Drivers License?	
Yes	50
No	50
Mean Current Monthly Child Support Due	\$396
Mean Total Back Child Support Owed	\$28,487

The intake form did not ask respondents their current income, but did ask their annual salary from their previous employment. Seventy-six percent of the sample reported an annual salary (based on previous employment) below \$25,000 a year, and 29% were below \$10,000 a year. The mean hourly wage from participants' most recent job was \$11.14 an hour. In response to the question "How well did [the salary from your most recent job] cover your financial needs?" 46% of participants answered "not at all" and 40% answered "not very well." The mean monthly child support payment a participant owed was \$396. On average participants owed \$28,487 of child support arrearages.

## 4.2 Main Analyses

Hypothesis 1. Rates of employment will significantly improve from the pretest to the posttest.

Hypothesis one was not supported. The percentage of employed veterans went from 11% at intake to 31% during the post-test period. A McNemarChi-Square test suggested these differences were not statistically significant,  $\chi^2 (1, N=40) = 2.45$ ,  $p = .065$ .

While the number of employed veterans increased from 5 to 14, Twenty-six veterans, 57% of the sample, were unemployed at both the pre and post-tests. The evidence does not support the hypothesis that a significantly greater percentage of veterans were employed at posttest compared to pretest.

Hypothesis 2. Mean monthly child support payments will significantly improve from pretest to posttest.

Hypothesis two was supported. The mean monthly payments for the entire sample went from \$51 at pretest to \$81 at posttest. A paired sample T-test suggested these differences were significant; ( $t = 2.72$ ,  $p = .009$ ),  $\omega = .07$ . While 49% of the sample made no child support payments at both pre and posttest, 22% of the sample went from making zero payments to averaging \$229 monthly payments during the posttest period. Another 13% of the sample went from averaging \$150 monthly payments to \$228 monthly payments between pre and posttests.

Research Question 1: What barriers to employment did participants report?

Table 2 shows participant responses to a series of questions asking veterans (at intake) to check off if any of the items applied to them. Between 40% and 50% of the sample identified the following barriers to employment: history of incarceration, lack of a valid driver's license, lack of reliable transportation, an arrest for DUI/DWI, and health problems or a disability.

**Table 2: Percentage of Veterans Self-Reporting Barriers to Employment**

Barrier	% (n=40)
Does not have valid Driver's License	50
Does not have access to reliable transportation	50
Reports a health problem or disability	46
Problems with alcohol or drugs	17
Trouble reading or writing	5
Problems speaking English	0
Lack of a Green Card	0
Lack of child care	0
Lack of education	10
Convicted of a misdemeanor	69
Convicted of a felony	31
Convicted of a violent crime	7
Convicted of spousal or child abuse	0
In an alcohol/drug abuse treatment program	57
Arrested for DUI/DWI	43
History of incarceration or jail—non child-support offense	50
Currently on probation or parole	9
Currently has charges pending	22

*Criminal Records.* The most common barrier to employment reported was being convicted of a misdemeanor (69%). One participant had obtained his Commercial Driver's License (CDL) from a DCSS sponsored program and had applied for numerous jobs but was unable to find a trucking company that would hire someone with a felony on his record. Even though the felony took place many years ago, and the participant had appeared to stabilize his life by becoming drug and alcohol free for over a year he could not find any trucking companies willing to hire him.

*Lack of a valid driver's license.* Several focus group participants did not have a valid driver's license. Although the Fatherhood Program had the ability to reinstate a suspended license (suspended specifically for lack of child support payments), these participants had their licenses suspended for other reasons. One veteran explained that the reason his license remained suspended was because he owed over \$1000 to a school he was required to attend after being arrested for DUI. He described his situation as a "Catch-22". To get his license back he needed to obtain employment, but he found it very difficult to get a job without a driver's license.

*Lack of reliable transportation.* Seven of eight focus group participants identified lack of reliable transportation as a major barrier to employment. The lack of reliable transportation remained a barrier to employment even for participants who had their driver's licenses reinstated by the Fatherhood Program. Having been homeless and unemployed, very few participants owned vehicles and most veterans had to rely on public transit to apply and interview for jobs and to get to the job if they were hired. Not having reliable transportation makes it much more difficult to apply for jobs and to commute to and from many job sites in metro Atlanta. In a recent study by the Brookings Institution, metro Atlanta's public transit ranked 91<sup>st</sup> worst out of 100 transit systems in the USA in terms of coverage and access to jobs (Tomer, Kneebone, Puentes, & Berube, 2011). The cost of one round trip on public transit is \$5.00, which can be substantial if participants are applying to numerous job advertisements.

Research Question 2: What types of legal issues did veterans experience?

All eight focus group respondents mentioned a least one legal issue and five veterans mentioned two. Legal issues included the following: divorce, legitimation, visitation, modification of child support, IRS & Housing debts, and expungement of criminal records. Two of eight participants stated their legal issues had improved during the course of the pilot program. One veteran had a first offense successfully expunged with the assistance of the Georgia Justice Project (not a partner to the collaboration), and another veteran had an expungement case pending with the same non-profit. Another veteran felt like the Ga. Law Center for the Homeless was making excellent progress with a visitation problem and seemed hopeful it would be resolved soon. Six of eight stated their legal issues were the same as when they entered the program. Three participants stated they were not aware that the collaborative offered legal assistance to participants.

Research Question 3. How did respondents perceive changes in their housing between pre and posttests?

Four of eight focus group participants stated their housing had improved since they started the pilot program. Three participants moved from a homeless shelter to transitional housing where they were sharing a subsidized apartment with one or more roommates. The other four participants stated their housing was the same since they started the program.

Two were living with parents and one was still living in a homeless shelter. All eight participants were on the waiting list to receive a housing voucher through the VASH (Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing) program. The VASH program provides a veteran with a Housing Choice Voucher (Formerly called Section 8) combined with case management and clinical services. The most common suggestion for improving housing assistance was to speed up the process for obtaining VASH housing vouchers.

Research Question 4: How did focus group participants perceive changes in their relationships with their children between pre and posttests?

Seven of eight veterans stated their relationships with their children remained about the same throughout the entire program. Two of these veterans stated their relationships with their children had always been positive and remained so today. One participant stated his relationship to his children had improved during the course of the program. He stated the reason for this is because he "sees them a lot more." Another veteran attributed an improved relationship with his children to being in recovery from alcohol and substance abuse, but he stopped drinking and doing drugs before he joined the pilot program. Five of eight participants suggested child-parent counseling or mediation as services that might improve their relationships with their children. One veteran suggested a "father-son retreat."

Research Question 5: What did participants consider to be the most helpful and least helpful aspects of the collaboration?

*The reinstatement of driver's licenses.* There was an overwhelming consensus among all focus group participants that the most valuable aspect of the pilot collaboration was the Fatherhood Program's ability to allow participants to reinstate/maintain their driver's licenses. One focus group participant whose license had been suspended for lack of child support payments expressed how quickly his license was reinstated: "I came in like on a Thursday and [his fatherhood agent] called me that Monday and told me they cleared it." Another veteran stated "It was the biggest help!" in regards to getting his license reinstated. Veterans were unanimous and quite emphatic that the program's power to keep their licenses from being suspended was the most helpful aspect of the program.

*Job leads.* In the area of employment, veterans in the focus groups felt like the leads they received from each other in their weekly meetings were more useful than the leads provided by their caseworkers.

If one participant found a business that was hiring he would share that news with others. Focus group respondents did not express much enthusiasm for the job leads provided by their DCSS caseworkers. Veterans felt like the least helpful aspect of the program was the lack of referrals to businesses that would hire veterans with the barriers to employment that most participants presented with. While the Fatherhood Program had partnerships with various job training organizations, it had no partnerships with employers who were willing to hire participants in this pilot project. Another unhelpful aspect of the program was the inability to significantly modify the child support debt levels many veterans were experiencing. While veterans were largely very positive about the various services provided by HCHV, one veteran disagreed with the HCHV policy that to receive services you had to have either a mental health or substance abuse diagnosis.

## **5. Discussion and Conclusion**

The results of this study showed a modest increase in monthly child support payments between pre and posttests, but no statistically significant increase in the percentage of homeless veterans obtaining employment over the 16 month period of the study. The first part of this discussion will explore three rival hypotheses that might explain the lack of significant results in employment gains among the sample. The final part will describe study limitations, suggestions for further research, and propose a more radical question about who should be the target of intervention: individual homeless veterans or social institutions?

When the pilot collaboration was launched in August 2010 unemployment in metro Atlanta was 10.3%; this rate fell to 9.2% at the study's close in December 2011. Average unemployment during 2011 was 9.8% (U.S Department of Labor, 2013). These rates were consistently above the national average. Long-term unemployment was one of the notable features of these historically high unemployment rates. Economists state that the aftermath of the 2008 world-wide financial crisis has created the worst economic conditions in the USA since the Great Depression of the 1930s (Eichengreen & O'Rourke, 2009; Roubini, 2009; Verick & Islam, 2011). These macro-economic factors might have had a profound effect on the lack of employment gains among our sample.

In the worst job market in 70 years it is no surprise that middle-aged, unemployed, homeless veterans, with recent histories of substance abuse, and large percentages with criminal records found it difficult to obtain employment.

If this same exact collaboration and study were implemented in an era of low unemployment (such as the late 90s) employment gains for the sample might have been demonstrably more significant.

The sampling procedure might also contribute to the lack of positive results in this study. We don't know the numbers of veterans who met the inclusion criteria but decided not to participate in the study. We also know nothing about the demographics of those who declined to participate. Our sampling procedure could have suffered from "reverse creaming" where rather than selecting participants most likely to succeed; the sampling procedure may have selected veterans least likely to obtain employment and pay child support. Since almost 50% of the sample did not have Driver's Licenses (and many were suspended for reasons other than not paying child support) and reported multiple, serious barriers to employment the sample may have been biased toward the hardest to serve potential participants. People with no jobs, no driver's licenses, and other barriers to employment might see the collaboration as their last best chance to remove these barriers and find employment.

Another obvious rival hypothesis is given the macro-economic conditions of 10% unemployment, and the challenges the sample presented with, the collaborative interventions were simply not strong enough to assist a significant portion of homeless veterans in finding employment and paying child support. Clearly, this sample of veterans needed stronger interventions specifically tailored to overcoming the most intractable barriers these veterans were facing: Finding jobs in spite of criminal records, assistance with transportation, and either finding (or creating) programs to help veterans get suspended drivers' licenses back (for reasons besides lack of child support payments). Even veterans with licenses cited lack of reliable transportation as a major barrier to employment. Fatherhood caseworkers seemed very aware of this problem. One caseworker had brainstormed the idea of creating a program to provide Mopeds or scooters to participants but was never able to find the funding or implement the plan. There was also no specific program tailored to helping participants with criminal records find employment.

### 5.1 Suggested Interventions, Study Limitations and Conclusion

Focus group participants were asked what improvements they would suggest for the collaboration. Several participants stated that DCSS should try and create partnerships with companies that would hire veterans (regardless of criminal records and homeless backgrounds) who were complying with their treatment programs and were willing to work. Even before the results of this evaluation were presented to DCSS officials, they were aware of this need.



In late 2011 DCSS partnered with Goodwill of North Georgia on a large grant (N = 1000) from the U.S. Department of Labor that provided guaranteed entry-level and transitional jobs to all applicants who complied with a rigorous screening process. This new study does not end until June 2015, so results are not yet available to compare to the present study's results.

One limitation of the study is that the pretest posttest only design does not allow researchers to infer causality between the intervention and the dependent variables. We have no idea how a control group or demographically matched comparison group would have progressed in terms of employment and child support payments without the intervention. Another limitation is not having any information on the number of (and demographics of) participants who met the inclusion criteria but declined to participate in the study. Without this data we have no idea how representative our sample was of the population of homeless veterans owing child support payments. Since only one of 8 focus group participants was employed the focus group sample was probably biased toward participants who had the most barriers to employment. In spite of these limitations, this research highlights some of the complex challenges facing unemployed, homeless veterans who are trying to stabilize their lives.

A final limitation of the study was that we had no measures for either clinical significance of the primary outcome variable child support payments or for the well-being of the children who were the nominal beneficiaries of child support payments. Since the average participant owed \$396/month and the mean monthly payment from participants who were employed was only \$228 it appears that even the best performers in the study were far from meeting their child support obligations. Since the original stated purpose of the collaboration was to ultimately improve the well-being of children, future studies should include measures of child well-being.

Our final position is more a more radical question than a rival hypothesis: should social institutions and norms be the target of intervention and change rather than individual homeless veterans? In this study we had a group of veterans who were largely compliant with their treatment protocols: maintaining sobriety, obtaining job training, going on job interviews, showing up for weekly accountability sessions, taking jobs that were offered to them, and paying what they could toward their child support obligations. Even the veterans in our study who found full time employment were not making enough money to meet their child support payment obligations.

Maybe we need to restructure the job marketplace where an individual who might have made some mistakes in the past, but is currently sober, motivated and willing to work should be able to get a job at a living wage. While this is easier said than done, the last 20 years has seen an upsurge in living wage campaigns (Brooks, 2007). Many low wage workers across the country are fighting for a \$15 an hour minimum wage (Parisien, 2013). Just two years ago the Occupy Movement made “we are the 99%” a household term and finally made increasing stratification and inequality the subject of popular debate in mainstream media (Milkman, Luce & Lewis 2013). Barbara Ehrenreich's book *Nickel and Dimed* about the challenges of living on low wage entry level jobs has surprisingly become a wildly popular, runaway best-selling book. While these various signs of social unrest and dissatisfaction with rising inequality have not coalesced and created significant policy change on the national level, we find it hard to imagine that without major structural change in the job marketplace that interventions targeted at changing the behavior of homeless veterans are going to put them on a trajectory of self-sufficiency and able to pay \$396 a month of child support.

## References

- Abt Associates, Inc. & U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2009). Veteran homelessness: A supplemental report to the 2009 annual homeless assessment report to congress. Retrieved from website: <https://www.onecpd.info/resources/documents/2009AHARveteransReport.pdf>
- Berenson, S. (2011). Homeless veterans and child support. *Family Law Quarterly*, 45(2), 173-190.
- Bloomer, S. R., & Sipe, T. A. (2003). The impact of the Georgia fatherhood program on employment and wages. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 29(4), 53-65.
- Brooks, F. (2007). The living-wage movement: Potential implications for the workinpoor. *Families in Society*, 88(3), 437 – 442.
- Division of Child Support Services. (2012). Fatherhood program. Retrieved from <http://dcss.dhs.georgia.gov/fatherhood-program>
- Eichengreen, B., O'Rourke K. H. (2009, April). A tale of two depressions. Retrieved from [http://economia.unipr.it/DOCENTI/CECCARELLI/docs/files/A\\_Tale\\_of\\_Two\\_Depressions.pdf](http://economia.unipr.it/DOCENTI/CECCARELLI/docs/files/A_Tale_of_Two_Depressions.pdf)
- Huck, S.W., & Cormier, W.H. (1996). *Reading statistics and research*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. NewYork: Harper Collins.
- Levine, G. (1981). *Introductory statistics for psychology: The logic and the methods*. NewYork:Academic Press.
- Milkman, R., Luce, S., & Lewis, P. (2013). *Changing the subject: A bottom-up account of Occupy Wall Street in New York City*. New York, NY: the Murphy Institute CityUniversity of New York. Retrieved from [http://sps.cuny.edu/filestore/1/5/7/1\\_a05051d2117901d/1571\\_92f562221b8041e.pdf](http://sps.cuny.edu/filestore/1/5/7/1_a05051d2117901d/1571_92f562221b8041e.pdf)

- Office of Child Support Enforcement. Office of Child Support Enforcement, Administration for Children and Families. (2011a). Child support fact sheet series, number 1. The story behind the numbers: Veterans in the child support caseload. Retrieved from: [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/programs/css/veterans\\_in\\_the\\_caseload.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/programs/css/veterans_in_the_caseload.pdf)
- Office of Child Support Enforcement. Office of Child Support Enforcement, (2011b). support fact sheet series: number 9. Promoting child well-being & family self-sufficiency: Ending homelessness among veterans: the OCSE-VA-ABA collaboration project. Retrieved from: [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ocse/ending\\_homelessness\\_among\\_veterans.pdf](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ocse/ending_homelessness_among_veterans.pdf)
- Parker, J. Pathways Community Network, (2011). Conditions of homelessness: 2011 metro atlanta tri-jurisdictional collaborative homeless survey. City of Atlanta, Fulton County and DeKalb County.
- Parisien, E. (2012, April 1). They're not loving it: Striking workers may be McDonald's worst nightmare. Retrieved from: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/elizabeth-parisian/mcdonalds-striking-workers\\_b\\_2979237.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/elizabeth-parisian/mcdonalds-striking-workers_b_2979237.html)
- Roubini, N. (2009). Roundtable: Nationalizing the banks. Retrieved from: <http://abcnews.go.com/ThisWeek/video?id=6932460>
- Schindler, H. S., & Coley, R. L. (2007). A qualitative study of homeless fathers: Exploring parenting and gender role transitions. *Family Relations*, 56(1), 40-51.
- Sorensen, E. & Zibman, C. (2001a, April). Poor dads who don't pay child support: Deadbeats or disadvantaged?. *The Urban Institute New Federalism: National Survey of America's Families*, B(B-30), 1-8.
- Sorensen, E., & Zibman, C. (2001b). Getting to know poor fathers who do not pay child support. *Social Service Review*, 75(3), 420-434. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/322221>
- Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Tomer, A., Kneebone, E., Puentes, R. & Berube, A. (2011, May). *Missed Opportunity: Transit and Jobs in Metropolitan America*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution. Available at: [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/reports/2011/5/12%20jobs%20and%20transit/0512\\_jobs\\_transit](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/reports/2011/5/12%20jobs%20and%20transit/0512_jobs_transit)
- U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013). Local area unemployment statistics. Retrieved from: <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/survey/most>
- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2013, February 28). Homeless veterans about the initiative. Retrieved from [http://www.va.gov/homeless/about\\_the\\_initiative.asp](http://www.va.gov/homeless/about_the_initiative.asp)
- Verick, S. & Islam, I. (2011). *The Great Recession of 2008-2009: Causes, Consequences and Policy Responses*. IZA Discussion Paper No. 4934. Retrieved from <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1631069>
- The White House. (2009, March 19). Veterans. Retrieved from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/veterans>
- The White House, (2012). Promoting responsible fatherhood. Retrieved from website: [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/fatherhood\\_report\\_6.13.12\\_final.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/fatherhood_report_6.13.12_final.pdf)