

Needs Assessment of Veterans and Their Families Residing in New York State



Study Characteristics

- **Research project was sponsored by the NYS Health Foundation**
- **Study was designed to aid in state-level planning and policy for New York**
- **Focused primarily on the health and wellbeing of Reservists, Retirees and Separated personnel residing in NY**
- **The full RAND report is available at:
http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/TR920.html**

Needs Assessment Used Multiple Types of Data Collection

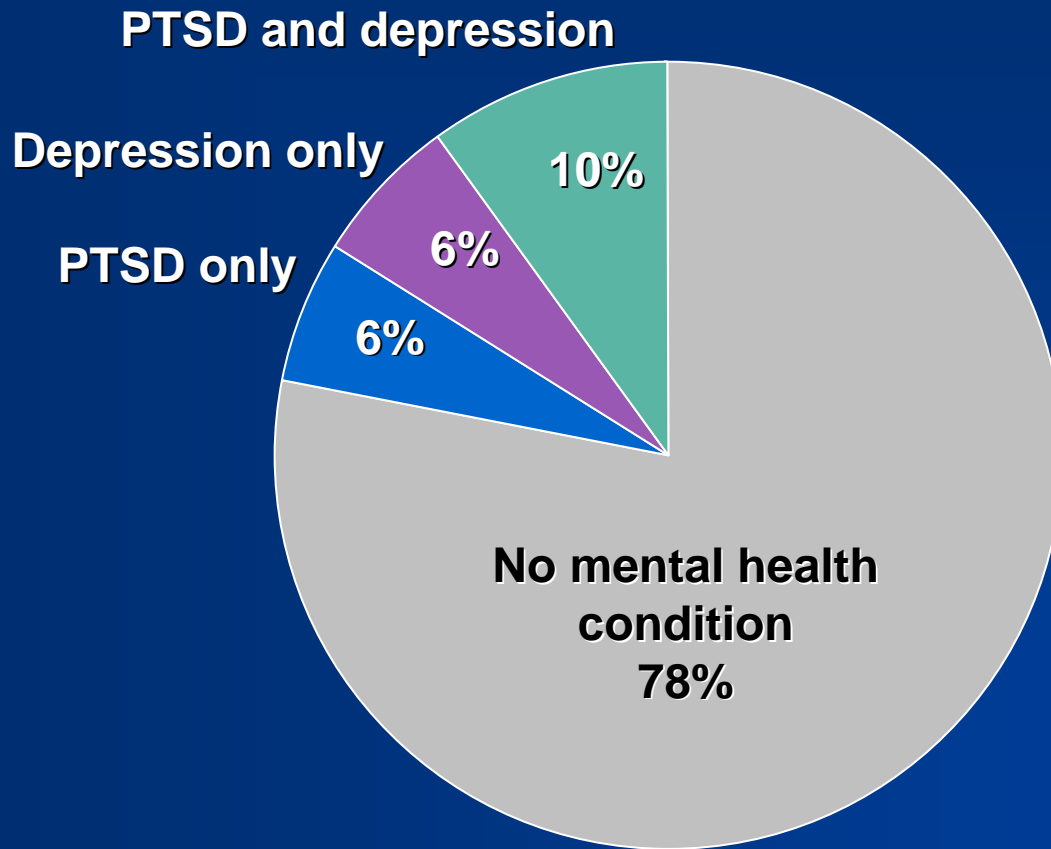
- **A phone/web survey of a representative sample of veterans and their spouses**
 - **913 veterans**
 - **293 spouses**
- **Six focus groups were conducted throughout the state, as well as some phone-based qualitative interviews.**
 - **Recruited primarily through IAVA**
 - **Included veteran family members**
- **Both qualitative and quantitative data look at a range of veterans' needs as well as evaluate the available services, programs, and policies**

***Survey of Veterans: Deployment Experiences,
Health Status, and Service Needs***

NY Veterans Report Being Exposed to Many Traumatic Events



Nearly 22% of NYS OEF/OIF Veterans Have a Current Probable Mental Health Condition



Alcohol Use and Binge Drinking Among Veterans

Alcohol Use in Prior 30 Days	Percentage or Mean
Abstained from alcohol	22%
At least one binge drinking episode	38%
Average number of days of binge drinking	2.4
Frequent binge drinking (5+ times in past 30 days)	16%

- **Alcohol use is similar to a gender and age matched subsample of the NSDUH**
 - Slightly lower levels of abstinence in vet sample (22% vs 31%)
 - No significant difference in quantity or binge
- **Only 9% reported past year use of any illicit drugs, significantly lower than age and gender matched individuals in the general population**

There Is Room for Improvement in Utilization of Mental Health Services

- **20% of the overall sample reported wanting, but not obtaining mental health services in the past year**
- **24% of the overall sample had sought help in the past year for a mental health problem, however more than half of those with a current probable diagnosis did not seek care in the past year.**
- **About half of those who sought help received a minimally adequate dose of treatment in the past year (either pharmacotherapy or talk therapy)**
- **Most care is given by mental health specialists rather than general physicians**
- **At least a third of the mental health care is occurring outside of the VA**

Employment Issues Among NYS Veterans

	Percentage of Veterans
Employed full or part time	72
Unemployed and looking for work	10
Not working*	18
Enrolled in university or college during past year	36
Among employed, looking for a new or additional job	38

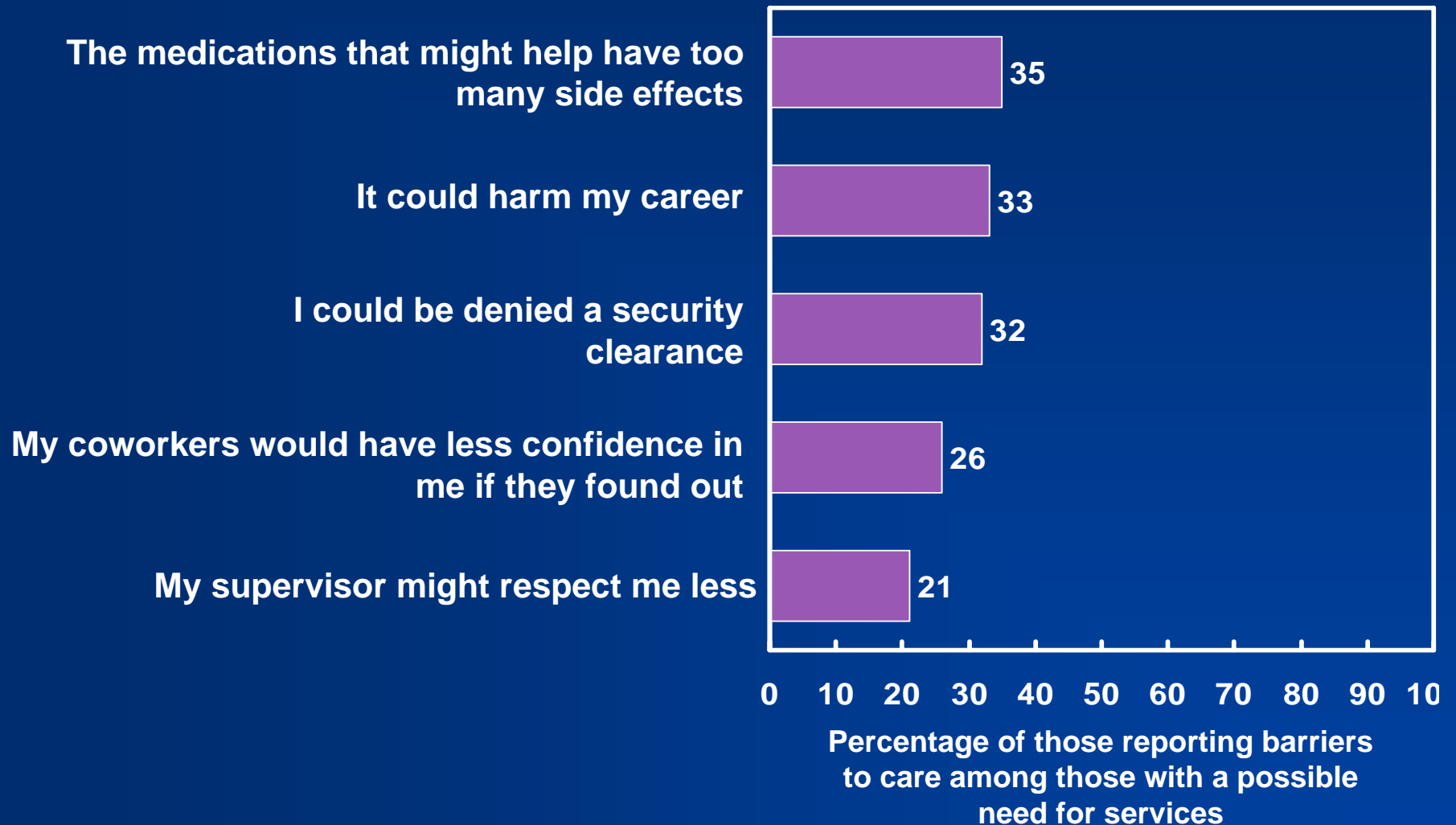
*includes students, homemakers, retired veterans, disabled veterans and those not looking for work

- **Veteran unemployment is higher than in the New York general population**
 - In our sample 13% of the potential work force was unemployed and looking for work
 - BLS reports an August 2010 unemployment rate of 8.3% for New York State

Higher Rates of Physical Health Problems

- **Veterans had lower scores on measures of overall physical health**
 - **The average physical functioning subscale score was 87 vs 91 found among age and gender matched population norms**
 - **The average role limitation due to physical health subscale score was 78 vs 88 found among age and gender matched population norms**
 - **Scores are .2 to .3 of a standard deviation below normal**
 - **Differences are attributable to a small subset of veterans with significant physical health problems**

What Are Seen as the Top 5 Barriers to Accessing Treatment?



Spouse Survey

Spouses Look Relatively Healthy

- Rate of depression was normal for their age and gender (10%)
- Overall physical health functioning was normal.
- Alcohol use and misuse were similar to rates found in the general population
- Unemployment rate (9%) was similar to the NY BLS rate
- In spite of much lower rates of disorder, mental health service seeking was almost as common as for veterans (21% vs 24%)
- Spouses endorsed fewer barriers to mental health treatment, particularly on items related to workplace discrimination

Qualitative Interviews

Veterans Face Many Challenges During Reintegration

- **Stress and mental health problems**
- **Feelings of social isolation**
- **Confusion about benefits and eligibility**
- **Unemployment or underemployment**
- **Difficulties funding education**
- **Difficulties with disability evaluations**
- **Lack of support for families**

Wide Range of Services are Available to Veterans and Their Families

- Many formal and informal programs are available through federal, state, and local organizations
- Perceptions about the accessibility and quality of the programs varies widely based on location
- Barriers to getting services in the VHA include:
 - Perceptions about quality
 - Lack of information
 - Delays in getting appointments
 - Burdensome paperwork requirements
 - Perceptions that services are for older, sicker veterans

Improving Services will Require Coordination and Sustainable Funding

- **Veterans suggested several ideas for improving services:**
 - **Centralized source of information**
 - **Building better linkages among veterans**
 - **Improving access to and quality of VA care**
 - **Creating resources for family members**
- **Better coordination is needed across sectors**
 - **Government: federal and state**
 - **Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs)**
 - **Private community based programs**

Overall Conclusions

- **Veterans residing in NY are at risk for several readjustment problems**
 - **Substantially higher risk of mental health problems**
 - **Somewhat higher risk for physical health and occupational problems**
 - **Standard or low risk for alcohol and substance misuse**
- **Spouses may benefit from a range of services, but are not at greater risk of problems than the general population**
- **Veterans are served by a very complex system of care**
 - **These systems are confusing to veterans and their caregivers**
 - **Civilian sources of care are often more convenient or otherwise preferred**
- **Improving access and quality of mental health care will require changes across many of these systems.**
- **Improvements may also require changing the perception that treatment will result in workplace discrimination**

