



Chicagoland Literature Review Summary

INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes key findings from a literature review conducted to identify research on the needs and challenges of currently-serving military personnel and veterans living in the Chicagoland, Illinois area and their family members. Chicagoland, a metropolitan region comprising the city of Chicago (Cook County) and several suburban counties, has a population of roughly 10 million people; and, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, Chicago has just over 71,000 veterans (*Chicago city, Illinois; United States (2014-2018), 2019*). Unfortunately, no public data appeared to be available on the number of active-duty military personnel in Chicago; however, data from the Department of Defense estimate that the state of Illinois has roughly over 21,000 active-duty military personnel and approximately 25,000 National Guard and Reserve members (*Defense Manpower Data Center: Statistics & Reports, March 2020*).

METHODS

A literature review was performed between March 2020 and April 2020. Articles were included in the review if they focused on the development, implementation, or evaluation of supports, services, or resources available for currently-serving military personnel (active-duty, National Guard, and Reserve), veterans, and their family members (e.g., spouses and children). Articles had to be either peer-reviewed or comprise research with transparent and reproducible data collection procedures. To locate these prospective articles, keyword searches including appropriate theme-corresponding terms were performed on Google Scholar and JSTOR.

FINDINGS

A total of five articles meeting the literature review's inclusion criteria were found. Of note, none of the studies directly referenced the needs/challenges of active-duty personnel; instead, the studies focused exclusively on veterans and their families. Additionally, three of the studies are from the same research group (Sullivan/Kintzle). The [first study](#) was The Chicagoland Veterans Study, consisting of 1,294 Chicagoland veterans (Kintzle et al., 2016). Key findings were that many service members who leave the military and relocate to the Chicagoland area are not ready for the transition, and, accordingly, struggle during the process. The study further found that most Chicagoland veterans leave the service without a job (65% for post-9/11 veterans), and only 13.1% seek employment. Veterans also reported significant housing distress and food insecurity; 19% of post-9/11 veterans reported being homeless in the past year, and 10% reported food insecurity (Kintzle et. al., 2016). The [second study](#) focused on a series of veterans' stakeholder working groups, addressing employment issues experienced by Chicagoland veterans (Miller and Sorenson, 2017). Key highlights from the working groups included arguments that it was important to: 1) develop specific metrics and goals around veteran employment and regularly assess progress against these goals; 2) introduce a mentor relationship at the recruitment stage to serve as a bridge between veterans and hiring managers; and 3) establish a veterans' resource group to support both veteran employees and their families, and involve veterans' family members in programs.



The [third study](#) was a research project conducted with 218 Chicagoland veteran parents with a child attending K-12 (Sullivan, 2020). Key findings highlight that veterans' children may face adjustment issues in school and that "common stressors experienced by veterans (e.g., poor mental health, unemployment) can impact perceptions of their child's functioning." A central conclusion is that a school's climate can have a protective effect against this and that building capacity in this respect is essential. The [fourth study](#) was an investigation done with 594 male Chicagoland veterans (Sullivan et. al., 2018). Key findings indicate that "increases in veteran functioning deficits were associated with poorer perceptions of family functioning and more negative reports of child outcomes." Additionally, the researchers concluded that prevention and intervention services targeting family functioning can be valuable in disrupting "cascading negative effects" of veterans' health deficits. The [fifth and final study](#) was a study conducted by WalletHub, a financial wellness blog, looking at various metrics of quality of life among a sample of veterans (37,800) across America's 100 largest cities. Overall, Chicago ranked 93rd (out of 100 cities total) for "best" cities for veterans (WalletHub, 2020). The report further detailed the following rankings for Chicago: Employment (87th), Economy (79th), Quality of Life (62nd), and Health (83rd).

SUMMARY/RECOMMENDATIONS

Contextually, the existing research available for review suggests there is a general lack of empirical investigation into the needs and challenges of military members/families in Chicago, and there appears to be especially little research coverage (if any at all) related to active-duty, National Guard, and Reserve service members and/or their families in Chicago. Further, female service members appear to be underrepresented in this research area, as do racial/ethnic minorities. In terms of actual reported findings from the studies included in the analysis, there appears to be outsized and persistent issues among Chicagoland veterans in regards to seeking, obtaining, and maintaining employment. There is also evidence that Chicagoland veterans may experience barriers in obtaining mental health support; this is a reality that may directly impact the psychosocial development and wellness of veterans' children in school and have secondary impacts on members' job readiness and job-seeking tendencies. These data broadly align with core finance/employment findings from Blue Star Families' 2019 Military Family Lifestyle Survey in Chicago, which found that roughly 77% of respondents experienced financial stress, and only 31% felt that local employers were eager to hire military-connected employees (2019 Military Family Lifestyle Survey - Chicago, 2020).

Based on the available evidence and results from the Military Family Lifestyle Survey, it is important to consider how we might best get upstream of issues that come to plague veterans and their families in Chicago upon members' return. That is, as prior in-depth research on reintegration has shown (Elnitsky et al, 2017), multidimensional macro and micro-level challenges must be overcome, through reinforcement and expansion of supports, so that the foundational anchors of social and economic well-being are in place prior to transition. Moreover, a more robust understanding of how "homecoming theory" manifests for members in Chicago, considering the area's unique social, economic and political landscape, is essential to this undertaking. According to homecoming theory,



returning members' ability to reconnect with formal and informal networks may be most central to their ability to transition, and peer support may be critical in this regard (Ahem et al., 2015). In a qualitative study by Ahem and colleagues on the transitioning process (Ahem et al., 2015), a veteran who had successfully transitioned and provided support and advice as a "peer navigator" was often regarded as a vital resource; Chicago's geographic density and ecological stressors may both enhance and hinder opportunities for the facilitation of such relationships.

In closing, our forthcoming needs assessment and focus groups should concentrate on further exploring the breadth, context, and nature of these local employment challenges and mental health maintenance and also delve into more nuanced sub-themes in-and-outside of these spaces. For example, members' preferences for employer engagement, interest in mentorship, child-parent relationship-building, housing and food insecurity, etc. Furthermore, of note, this exploratory analysis was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is likely that many of the parameters observed in the research reviewed here—from financial stability and housing down to family cohesion and personal mental health (PTSD symptomatology, in particular)—have been worsened by the pandemic considering that Chicago was an initial hotspot in the early phases of the crisis and had some of the most extensive lockdown policies in the country. More intensive research in this space, considering the overlap and potential extension of challenges before, during, and after the crisis, is thus warranted and necessary to understand how resilience in these communities may operationalize and be pressurized over time for Chicagoland members and their families.

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