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For Women Veterans, Battles Go On at Home

Female Vets Face Lower Pay, Higher Incidence of Homelessness and Fewer Services than Their Male Counterparts

By Russ Mitchell



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With over 200-thousand female service members deployed, they make up 11% of the total force. As Russ Mitchell reports, female Veterans are facing a tough battle after they return home.



Iraq war veteran Angela Peacock is pictured with her companion dog GI Joe. Peacock became homeless after returning

(CBS) More than 212,000 female service members have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan - 11 percent of the total force. One hundred twenty have been killed in action and more than 600 wounded, but the losses don't end there. **CBS News correspondent Russ Mitchell** reports on the battles these female warriors face after they return home.

Angela Peacock is just 30 years old, a veteran of the Iraq war who was discharged from the Army for health reasons and became homeless.

"Why does it have to be so hard," she sobs, "to just have a home and to just have a normal life?"

Peacock says she was living "from couch to couch" and "cleaning people's houses so I could stay with them."

"It's disgusting," said Paul Rieckhoff, head of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans Association. "It's a national disgrace that these heroic people are coming home and ending up homeless."

Rieckhoff's organization issued a report that says

from the war with post-traumatic stress disorder. Female vets face lower pay, more homelessness and fewer services than their male counterparts. (CBS)

homelessness among young returning female fighters is on the rise.

The report, "Women Warriors," says female veterans earn on average \$10,000 a year less in civilian jobs than male vets, making it harder to afford a home. And less than 5 percent of the homeless shelters run by the Veterans Affairs Department offer women separate housing from men.

"There are a variety of reasons why someone can end up homeless. A core factor many of them face is untreated mental health injuries like post traumatic stress disorder," Rieckhoff said.

Post traumatic stress disorder or PTSD was the reason Peacock was sent home from Iraq .She had spent her time in Baghdad driving in unarmored trucks and fearing roadside bombs.

"You don't ever know is today going to be the day," Peacock said. "A lot of us wrote letters home like, 'If I die give this to my mom.'"

Her downward spiral accelerated when she returned from Iraq She became addicted to prescription drugs. Her husband left her, making her homeless. She found it hard to readjust to life back in St Louis.

"War does something to you where it just twists everything," Peacock said. "I don't look the same, I don't act the same, I don't have the same mannerisms."

"Almost half the women who we see today that are homeless are under 35," said Peter Dougherty, director of the homeless program at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The VA says on any given night there are an estimated 6,500 homeless female vets. That's double the number a decade ago.

Angela Peacock now rents a house and has new support: GI Joe - a companion dog provided by the VA to help her cope with the PTSD when she's in public places.

"I have my days that are hard to get out of bed, and if fireworks or something goes off I'm just like done for the day," Peacock said. "But it's much better than it was. Much better."

For its part, the VA recently announced a five-year plan to wipe out homelessness among all xvggtcpu0