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World Health Organization (WHO)
Research Report

Topic 3: Confronting mental health issues in homeless communities



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Introduction:

How are homelessness and mental health connected? Researchers believe that the relation between mental health and homelessness is complicated. An individual's mental illness may lead to behavioral problems that make it difficult to earn a stable income or to carry out daily activities. People with poor mental health lack the capacity to sustain employment which in return results in little income.

Definition of Key Terms:

Poverty: the state or condition of having little or no money, goods, or means of support; condition of being poor.

Enforcement: interventions that seek to strengthen community safety by responding to the crimes and community disorder issues associated with the importing, manufacturing, cultivating, distributing, possessing and using legal and illegal substances.

American Psychiatric Association: The American Psychiatric Association is the main professional organization of psychiatrists and trainee psychiatrists in the United States, and the largest psychiatric organization in the world.

Re-Housing: to move someone to a new and usually better place to live:

Background Information:

Poor mental health is both a cause and a consequence of homelessness. Mental illnesses can trigger a sequence of events which may lead to homelessness. Delusional thinking may lead to a person to detach from friends, family and other people. This loss of support leaves them fewer coping mechanisms which may lead to even further irrational decisions. For all these given reasons people with mental illnesses are at a greater risk of experiencing homelessness. The most prevalent mental illnesses among homeless people include depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, drug and alcohol abuse, and anxiety disorders. Furthermore, it can also be said that homelessness amplifies a person's poor mental health. The harsh and difficult circumstances a person faces during times of homelessness may aggravate certain past mental issues and encourage anxiety, depression and substance abuse. People with mental illnesses have less contact with family members during their times of homelessness and experience homelessness to a greater degree that lasts for longer periods of time. In general 30% - 35% out of the people that experience homelessness, and up to 75% of women that experience homelessness, suffer from mental illnesses.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved:

USA: *“In the USA, healthcare professionals were among the first responders to the homelessness ‘epidemic’ of the 1980s. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health Care for the Homeless initiative funded 19 health clinics around the nation, beginning in 1985. Individual physicians, including Jim Withers in Pittsburgh and Jim O’Connell in Boston, made it their mission to go out on the streets rather than participating in the ‘institutional circuit’ that led so many homeless men and women to cycle in and out of emergency departments, hospitals and jails. Health problems such as skin ulcerations, respiratory problems, and injuries were the visible indicia of what foretold a shortened lifespan. Less visible but no less dire are the emotional sequelae of being unhoused – children are especially susceptible to the psychological effects of homelessness and housing instability. The gap between mental health needs and service availability for the homeless population is vast.”* (Padgett)

Brazil: *“Approximately 1.2 million Brazilians are either homeless or living in inadequate housing. This housing crisis was, in part, caused by rising land costs. Brazil’s industrialization and involvement in globalization raised land prices. As a result, poor and unemployed Brazilians are unable to afford land costs and are forced to remain in unsanitary and overcrowded conditions.”* (Stanski)

“In 2009, the Brazilian government began a housing program for low-income Brazilians. This program, called Minha Casa, Minha Vida (My House, My Life), provided more than 10 million Brazilians with secure housing offers over seven years. In 2016, however, the government made major cuts to the program.” (Stanski)

Nigeria: *“Approximately 24.4 million homeless people live in Nigeria. This accounts for roughly 13 percent of the nation’s overall population. The issue is particularly egregious in the capital of*

Lagos, where 70 percent reside in “informal settlements.” (Roberts) “There are many efforts to reach the street kids of Nigeria. Nigerians who are working to help homeless youth include James Okina. Okina is a former street kid who founded the program Street Priests when he was just 15 years old, which is an organization to rehabilitate homeless children. Moreover, Seyi Oluyole is a choreographer with the organization who is attempting to heal street youth by teaching dance. Okina reached approximately 3,330 through his practice of social and emotional learning. Other organizations like Street Child seek to place displaced children back in school and assist with social and psychological problems.” (Roberts)

Healthcare for the Homeless: “Healthcare for the Homeless is located in Houston, Texas. This organization focuses on providing access to transportation, medical clinics, dental clinics, HIV prevention, and more. This organization has already impacted thousands of homeless individuals, with over 8,000 clients using these services to attain better healthcare. Since its start in 2010, the number of patient visits has doubled.” (Ensor)

Crisis: “Crisis was founded in 1967 and offers direct help to people facing homelessness. The charity also campaigns to find solutions to problems around homelessness in the UK. The charity offers education, employment, housing and well-being services as well as one-to-one support, advice and courses for homeless people in 12 areas across England, Scotland and Wales Crisis commissions and conducts research to help document UK homelessness via its knowledge hub and find solutions to critical issues around housing and homelessness.” (Lobb, Geraghty and Bhadani)

Relevant UN Resolutions:

The General Assembly recognized that homelessness is an affront to human dignity when it adopted resolution 76/133 on inclusive policies and programs to alleviate homelessness on December 16, 2021.

The 58th meeting of the UN Commission on Social Development, where the historic first United Nations resolution on homelessness was adopted. Homelessness is a major infringement of human dignity and has spread to every country. People of all ages and from all walks of life are being affected, in both developed and developing nations.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue:

Various solutions have been found by experts in order to put an end to the homelessness crisis all around the world. For example in New York people were stabilized through shelter, moved into permanent housing and were implemented assistance programs in order to help keep people in their housing.

Possible Solutions:

There are many possible solutions that can be beneficial for the homeless. The establishment of new charities that support the creation of homeless friendly shelters can be one of the possible solutions. As for a far simpler solution the construction of newer homes for the homeless that cost less and the re-housing of the homeless can also be given for possible solutions.

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