



### Substance Abuse and Homelessness

One of the worst stereotypes regarding homeless populations is one's history with drug abuse. Far too often have I seen people make automatic assumptions about the status of homeless people as drug addicts or alcoholics, who would use all the money put towards helping them for another high. This assumption always comes with disdain and disgust for the community, and puts a harmful label on people just trying to survive.

An important note is that substance abuse can be a cause and consequence of homelessness, much like a criminal record. Substance abuse can cause people to lose their jobs and livelihoods, due to its costly nature. It can ruin relationships and the hyperfixation put on drugs/alcohol when someone is suffering from addiction can cause terrible spending prioritization. In a 2008 survey by the US Conference of Mayors, 25 cities were asked for their top 3 causes of homelessness, where substance abuse was ranked "the single largest cause of homelessness for single adults (reported by 68% of the cities)... According to Didenko and Pankratz (2007), two-thirds of homeless people report that drugs and/or alcohol were a major reason for their becoming homeless" (National Coalition for the Homeless). Along with this, a lot of people who become homeless do end up substance abusers. You can imagine how dire being in a state of homelessness is, especially for those new to the lifestyle and without any emotional support. In such a hard situation, many turn to substances that help them cope and to

escape reality for as long as they can stay high. So all in all, while the stereotype around homelessness and substance abuse is very harmful, it's not entirely wrong.

However, why do we give up all hope on someone suffering through substance abuse? Why do we look down on someone with addiction, and refuse to offer them any sort of help because of our assumptions of it going to waste? The truth is, addiction is an illness, and we need to view it as such. When we abandon people in need of treatment, we are killing them. The stigma around substance abusers doesn't only relate to the homeless, as many people with stable livelihoods that suffer through substance abuse are looked down on too. Addiction isn't something someone can just stop. The cravings only intensify and the body begins to physically need it to the point of someone going through withdrawals of intense pain and sickness. For those that are homeless especially, trying to stop addiction alone would be incredibly difficult. That's why we need to provide them with the medical help they need. Homeless people need to be given the support system they need, and the government needs to step up. This is a topic I talk about frequently in my blogs, but I still feel the need to readdress it. The government needs to start putting supported housing programs and treatment in place for homeless communities. The people in the homeless community aren't helpless, but they are being abandoned. By expecting them to just get over their struggles and get a job, we abandon them. Times have changed, and nowadays it's difficult for people with college degrees to find well paying jobs. Nonetheless someone struggling with homelessness. By putting in supported housing programs, we can at least provide many homeless people with the resources they need to get up on their feet. For those suffering with substance abuse, supported housing programs along with treatment can help them heal. Respecting those in the community and providing them with the help they need would save so many lives and improve the lives of many more.

Sources:

<https://www.nationalhomeless.org/factsheets/addiction.pdf>

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