

LGBTQ+ and Homeless: A Growing Correlation

By Preston Saunders



The LGBTQ+ community is well-known for their dedication and support for one another, achieving multiple milestones in the past decade that have helped to cement their equal standing in society. However, there is a long road ahead when it comes to maintaining their inherent human rights. Systemic discrimination is at an all time high, especially in America, and inequality comes in all forms. LGBTQ+ youth especially lack equal footing and struggle with issues like homelessness, mental health, and invisibility in the eyes of policymakers.

LGBTQ+ youth are disproportionately affected by homelessness, holding a 120% higher rate than straight and cisgender youth. Almost a third of homeless youth are LGBT or questioning. Much of this is a result of the lack of parental support that stems from being gay or transgender, as these children are disowned or removed from households that care more about upholding the nuclear family image than their children's well-being. A common cause is that

these youths are from families with cultures that are typically anti-homosexuality or religious extremists, which is the reason for such strict reinforcement of societal norms. However, another large influence on kicking LGBTQ+ youth out onto the street is the wealth bracket and level of poverty of the family. In lacking a financially stable environment and proper living arrangements, around 87% do not complete high school and in turn cannot enter the workforce at a high enough level of pay to sustain themselves. As a child with no support and very little official documentation such as state ID or birth certificate, it is difficult to apply for shelters or work programs. This is coupled with the discrimination shown in privately-owned businesses that makes finding work even more difficult for individuals of differing sexual orientations and gender minorities.

Not only is economic ability affected by parental acceptance, but also physical and mental health. Homeless LGBTQ+ populations are highly vulnerable to drug and alcohol abuse, sex trafficking or sexual abuse, and discrimination. A lack of access to medical facilities and a high prevalence of sex work leads to high rates of STD infection and compounded health issues. Transgender youth have especially high rates of substance usage, as well as high figures of early death resulting from murder attempts by hate groups. All contribute to the increased rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide among homeless LGBTQ+ youth. It is also proven that the trauma that comes with the abuse and hardship that homelessness has on a person is compounded for children still in their developmental years, resulting in higher risk of mental health problems later in life.

A major problem inherent in the system is the backburner placement of LGBTQ+ issues. While gay and transgender culture have become more mainstream through events like Pride Month and media formats that normalize gay relationships, the inequality and injustice still

bubbling under the surface has been overshadowed. Many people feel their work in fixing the problem is complete. As a bisexual woman myself, I know a fair amount about invisibility. Lawmakers only see issues that are large-scale and actively pushed for by citizens, and there is not enough coverage for the struggles of the homeless in America. The truth of the matter is that as long as prejudice exists, eliminating the cause of LGBTQ+ youth's homelessness will not be a clean fix. Nothing will prevent parents from refusing to care for their children. Instead, the focus must be placed on streamlining and building more facilities for homeless youth to find their footing. The youth need better health services, opportunities to find work and pursue education, and greater media coverage to let the public know that their inequality persists.

References

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