



How Mental Illness Contributes to Homelessness

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Homelessness adds immense stress to the lives of those who suffer from it.

Homelessness is much more than housing instability, for instance, many homeless people also suffer from food insecurity, and many homeless adults find themselves responsible for young children. It is no surprise, then, that a third of adults who struggle with homelessness have also suffer with at least one mental illness. The most common disorders diagnosed among those experiencing homelessness include depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and substance abuse disorders (Fazel et al. 225).

The relationship between mental illness and homelessness is a mutually reinforcing one. Having a mental illness puts an individual at greater risk for experiencing homelessness

(National Coalition for the Homeless 2009). For example, people who are diagnosed with a mental disorder are more likely to have mental or behavioral issues that make it difficult to hold a steady job. Mental illness can also cause those effected to isolate themselves from their loved ones, thus putting themselves at greater risk for experiencing homelessness. Homeless individuals are also at greater risk for experiencing trauma directly related to homelessness, for example, physical and/or sexual violence, as well as substance abuse. Thus, experiencing homeless can cause the development of mental illness in those who hadn't previously experienced it, and exacerbate the symptoms of those already suffering. Additionally, experiencing mental illness while homeless can increase the difficulties of trying to overcome poverty. For example, poor mental health combined with homelessness often results in physical illness and injuries, which further increases the difficulty of obtaining and keeping a steady job (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2009).

Experiencing homelessness for the mentally ill also increases the likelihood that these individuals will be arrested for and/or be the victims of a crime (Roy et al. 740). Living on the street heightens the risk for victimization at the hands of others, and those with mental illness, especially those with severe mental disorders, often become targets because they are more vulnerable, and lack the safety that housing provides. Experiencing homelessness also increases exposure to criminal activity, such as substance abuse, and increases the chances that they will engage in these activities themselves. In the case of substance abuse, being homeless increases contact with illegal substances, and the presence of an already existing mental illness heightens the chances that they will use.

Mothers suffering with mental illness are particularly vulnerable for experiencing homelessness. For example, mothers who experience postpartum depression are at an increased

risk for becoming homeless for up to three years after they have given birth (Curtis et al. 1669). Even in mothers who have no previous history with mental illness and no family history of mental illness are at increased risk for becoming homeless after experiencing postpartum depression. Mothers' mental illnesses is especially important because the welfare of her children depends greatly on her wellbeing and ability to provide for them. Therefore, children of mothers who suffer from mental illness are at a greater risk not only for experiencing homelessness, but also for experiencing violence and substance abuse as a result of their homelessness, as well as developing their own mental illnesses.

Works Cited

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