



## Prevalence of Disability in Homeless Communities

By Preston Saunders

Disabilities are a major part of a person's everyday life that are not often talked about, and especially not so often in the context of homelessness. When assessing cognitive and physical disabilities, homeless populations have been found to be disproportionately represented. Nearly 50% of all homeless individuals have a disability, which is a jump from the 40% of 15 years ago. It is difficult to find shelters with proper accommodations or qualified caregivers, and even more difficult to argue the necessity for policies that support those most impacted.

In most cases, becoming disabled will have a toll on both home and work life, which leads to unemployment and dependence on meager rations from the federal government. Around 17.7% of Americans have some form of disability, and this number grows exponentially among homeless populations. Many feel that The American Disabilities Act (ADA), which was put into action by George H. W. Bush in 1990, did not do exactly what it promised, which was to keep discrimination toward disabled people out of the workplace. Many cite lower income as a reason for homelessness, but it is also the lack of dependable care and difficulties in communicating with others, such as a boss or family member. The system also lacks the ability to provide a variety of treatments. Physically disabled people will receive more money from government programs than the mentally impaired, as surface-level issues are deemed easier to treat, and severe mental health issues occur 15 times more often among homeless adults.

Despite the sizable amount of evidence in the scientific community that records the prevalence of cognitive impairment in homeless populations, very little research is being done to name intellectual disability as a contributing cause of homelessness. Thus, the ability to escape homelessness has always been skewed away from many mentally ill or physically impaired people, as there is not enough evidence to prove the need for funding preventative programs that support physical therapy, counseling, or provide equipment like prosthetics and wheelchairs.

This, multiplied by the high cost of health insurance and the compounding debt that is an American staple, the socio-economic status of many homeless people is difficult to raise. Even when applying to programs like Medicare and Social Security, any application processes are lengthy and require a presence of mental stability that is not always accounted for. Another form of disability can be difficulty in maintaining typical levels of testing and overall learning aptitude. Within homeless populations, many factors can contribute to intellectual disability, such as prolonged alcohol or substance abuse, lack of regular schooling, and health complications. Therefore, they don't have the resources that many others in their age bracket have. Many children who become homeless at a young age do not have as much access to even basic public schools, which limits the brain's ability to develop.

Without healthcare and available programs to help manage each person's specific disabilities, finding work will continue to be a near impossible task. The solution is firmly rooted in prevention, and until more research is done to convince others of the support disabled people in the homeless community need, resources will remain few and far between.

#### *References*

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