



Effects of Homelessness on Pregnancy

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The national rates of homelessness continue to rise, and among the most affected are mothers and children, in fact about 1 in every 45 American children will experience homelessness during the course of a year (Cutts et al., 1276). Children who experience homelessness are at an increased risk for suffering from a number of physical and mental ailments, including chronic illness, malnutrition, learning disabilities, and emotional and behavioral disorders. New evidence has suggested that pregnancy is a critical time of development for infants, and homelessness of the mother can have detrimental effects on the health of both her and her baby (Cutts et al, 2177).

Women who are homeless during their pregnancy are at much greater risk for experiencing a pregnancy complication, including both complications that were considered fairly common as well as those that are extremely rare (Clark et al., 139). For instance, women who are homeless during their pregnancies are more likely to give birth prematurely, or to give birth

to a baby with a low birth weight. While these may seem somewhat common as far as pregnancy complications go, these complications can be quite serious and have detrimental impacts on the health of the babies. Low birth weight and premature birth are among the leading causes of infant mortality and the presence of significant physical disabilities (Cutts et al., 1281). Pregnancy and birth complications can also continue to affect these children for the rest of their lives. For example, children who are born with a low birth weight show less academic achievement all the way into their adulthood than their peers who were a healthy weight at birth (Little et al., 617). Infants that are born premature are also more likely to experience additional complications than babies who are carried to full term; they are also more likely to be admitted to the NICU, more likely to be stay longer in the hospital after birth, as well as being readmitted, and they are more likely to have behavioral disorders, such as ADHD (Cutts et al., 1281). With lower academic performance, these children are less likely to get a higher education, and therefore less likely to get a job that will provide them with financial security.

There are several risk factors homeless mothers are exposed to as a result of their homelessness which can lead to pregnancy complications. Homelessness can lead to a lack of resources, both socially and financially, that expecting mothers need to promote their health and the health of their child. Financial instability, which usually goes hand in hand with homelessness, can block access to essential resources, such as prenatal care and vitamins, as well as proper nutrition, which can all contribute to pregnancy complications. Homeless mothers also often lack social support, and this social isolation as well as the stress of caring for a new baby can have adverse effects on mental health. For instance, homeless expecting mothers are prone to experiencing anxiety and depression, which are associated with hypertension, as well as increased amounts of the stress hormone, cortisol, both of which can be harmful to the baby

(Cutts et al., 1281). Homelessness is also associated with increased use of drugs and alcohol, as well as cigarette smoking, which can also contribute to pregnancy complications, (Cutts et al. 1281).

Works Cited

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