

Impaired through Homelessness, and Homeless through Impairment

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Disability is a broad, difficult human rights issue, and those affected are always in need of careful consideration and complex regulations. In many areas, our world has been steadily improving. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has done much to alleviate disability discrimination in the workplace, transportation, building architecture, public accommodations, communication, and more. But the degree of this change is limited by another major social issue, homelessness.

A significant demographic of individuals experiencing unsheltered or chronic homelessness will often have a disability of some kind. These issues are heavily linked. Homelessness disproportionately affects the lives of the disabled and is often associated with environments that create disabilities. And vice versa, the barriers and impairments of the disabled often lead to homelessness.

Low-income communities are subject to constant health risks because of environmental exposure. Dubbed environmental injustice, communities of poverty are documented to have a 35% higher burden from particulate matter emissions than the overall population. Exposure to chemical waste, lead, water contamination, climate change, and air pollution correlate with the formation of disabilities such as asthma, lung cancer, diabetes, and even developmental issues. One major incident is the Flint Water public health crisis in 2014, in which 6000–12000 children were exposed to lead and Legionella bacteria through drinking water, causing lifetime IQ and

physical development impairments. However, the formation of disabilities can come from simpler means.

Employment, housing, and general economic stability are pillars of personal fulfillment, and without that sensation, one's personal health can deteriorate rapidly. The experience of homelessness itself increases rates of chronic mental and physical health conditions. Economic instability is extremely damaging to one's productivity, self-esteem, perception of life, and especially the motivation to find a way out.

This downward curve is amplified for the disabled and homeless. In 2018, 17.4 million adults with disabilities experienced frequent mental distress, nearly five times as often as those without disabilities. The disabled are already a frail population that is vulnerable to the risks of homelessness and social exclusion without adequate accommodations and emotional support. They are often in fear of negative judgment and repercussions whenever their impairments limit their productivity and their relationships. America's worsening issues with affordable housing, healthcare, and rising rent costs are an expanding barrier to the access of institutions that offer these resources.

Faltering mental health, poverty, and disability is also a path to becoming less favorable for employment. While the ADA has many strict rules that prevent employers from discriminating against the disabled, the existence of said rules and regulations, is not the end all be all of this issue. While overt physical disabilities are well accommodated when a company offers them, the range of invisible disabilities and their specific impairments are factors employers are not always aware of. Workers with immunodeficiency, less access to transportation, physical limitations, and unique social habits are not lesser workers, but long-held biases toward the education, capabilities, and reliability of the disabled homeless are sadly unavoidable. The U.S Bureau of Labor Statistic reported that 8 out of 10 individuals with disabilities to not be in the labor force in 2020. 50-70% of persons with disabilities within working ages are reported to be unemployed in industrialized countries in general. Considering that persons with disabilities are already paranoid about the stigmas they may experience in the workplace, it is not surprising that a common strategy during the employment process is to delay disclosing an invisible disability for as long as possible.

The crisis of public health regulations, mental health, resource barriers, and unemployment leaves a fatalistic viewpoint to the disabled homeless. What chance do they have if disability regulations cannot erase America's deeper institutional problems that are so set against them? More awareness is definitely the answer to removing the barriers for the disabled, but the widely known problem of homelessness is still lacks a committed answer, and they will continue to suffer as result. The worsening crisis of unemployment and adequate housing will never guarantee that disability regulations will progress.

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