

# A Review of The Impact of Homelessness on Mental Health

## ABSTRACT:

**Background:** Homelessness is a highly complex social problem of international importance. Housing as a social determinant of health significantly impacts an individual's health and well-being. This paper aims to discuss the various effects of homelessness on the mental health of the homeless population and gain insights into the relationship between homelessness and mental health outcomes.

**Methods:** We conducted a literature review following a systematic methodology. We searched PubMed, PsycINFO, and Scopus, utilizing a combination of keywords related to homelessness, mental health, and their impact.

**Results.** The reviewed studies consistently highlighted the prevalence of mental health disorders among homeless individuals, ranging from depression, suicide, alcoholism, substance abuse, and schizophrenia. The findings emphasized the dynamic relationship between homelessness and mental health, as homelessness can trigger and exacerbate mental health problems.

**Conclusions:** This review emphasizes the urgent importance of mental health support and housing solutions for homeless individuals. By recognizing the relationship between homelessness and mental health, society can work towards implementing effective strategies that promote recovery and social inclusion for this vulnerable population.

**Keywords:** Homelessness, Mental health, Impact, Vulnerability, Access to healthcare, trauma, Stigma.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Homelessness remains a pressing social issue with far-reaching implications for individuals and communities worldwide [1]. Amidst the myriad of challenges faced by individuals experiencing homelessness, their mental health is particularly vulnerable and significantly affected [2].

Homelessness brings forth numerous uncertainties, such as the constant worry of not knowing where the next meal will come from, the struggle to find a safe place to sleep, and the burden of financial instability. These challenges inflict significant stress on individuals affected by homelessness, as they are constantly burdened by the unpredictable nature of their circumstances [3]. The constant stress experienced by homeless individuals can profoundly affect their well-being, potentially making them more susceptible to the onset and exacerbation of various mental health disorders [4]. The homeless population has higher rates of mental health disorders when compared to the housed population [5]

There are various levels of homelessness, ranging from temporary loss of housing to primary homelessness [6]. Homelessness reaches across the lifespan affecting people of all ages. Adolescents and young adults can account for approximately 31 000 homeless individuals in one night in 2019 [7]. In the United States, many people affected by homelessness are between the ages of 18 and 24 [7]. Mental health is gravely affected by homelessness [8]. Studies have shown that people affected by homelessness have higher rates of depression and anxiety when compared to people who are not homeless [8]. Approximately 75% of adults have had at least one form of mental illness before age 25 [7].

The correlation between mental health and homelessness is a complex problem that involves multiple factors. While it is true that mental health challenges play a role in leading to homelessness, it is just one of many factors that contribute to this outcome. When an individual's mental health begins to deteriorate and interfere with their activities of daily living, it can set off a chain of events that may eventually result in homelessness. This review aims to comprehensively examine and analyze the impact of homelessness on mental health and also provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics between homelessness and mental health. It also emphasizes the urgent need for effective interventions and strategies to address homelessness. It also explores the association between homelessness and various psychiatric conditions, such as schizophrenia, substance abuse, and depression. Furthermore, this review examines the barriers and challenges homeless individuals face in accessing adequate mental health care.

## **2. METHODOLOGY:**

To investigate the impact of homelessness on mental health, we conducted a literature review following a systematic methodology. Our primary objective was to examine the existing evidence and gain insights into the relationship between homelessness and mental health outcomes.

**Inclusion criteria:** We selected studies based on the following criteria:

1. **Relevance:** Studies that focused on the impact of homelessness, specifically on mental health outcomes.
2. **Peer-reviewed:** We included articles published in peer-reviewed journals to ensure the credibility and quality of the research.
3. **Publication Date:** We considered studies published within the last ten years to incorporate recent findings.
4. **Study Design:** We included studies with various designs, such as cross-sectional studies, longitudinal studies, and qualitative studies, to capture a wide range of evidence.
5. **Language:** We included studies published in English due to resource constraints.

**Exclusion criteria:** We excluded studies that did not meet the defined inclusion criteria, including those that primarily focused on non-mental health outcomes, studies published prior to the last ten years, non-peer-reviewed sources, studies not available in the English language, and studies that did not specifically address the impact of homelessness on mental health.

**Literature search:** We conducted a comprehensive search across multiple electronic databases, including PubMed, PsycINFO, and Scopus, utilizing a combination of keywords related to

homelessness, mental health, and their impact. The keywords used included "homelessness," "mental health," "impact," "vulnerability," "access to healthcare," "trauma," and "stigma."

**Screening and selection process:** We initially screened the identified studies based on their titles and abstracts, eliminating those irrelevant to the research question. Subsequently, we retrieved the full texts of the remaining studies and further assessed their relevance. Studies that met the inclusion criteria were included in the final review.

**Data extraction and synthesis:** We extracted relevant data from the selected studies, including study characteristics, methodology, key findings, and conclusions. We organized and synthesized the extracted data to identify common themes and patterns related to the impact of homelessness on mental health outcomes.

**Data analysis and interpretation:** We critically analyzed the included studies' findings, considering each study's strengths and limitations. We interpreted the results to determine the overall impact of homelessness on mental health, exploring factors such as vulnerability, access to healthcare, trauma, and stigma.

**Reporting:** We documented the entire literature review process, including the research question, methodology, findings, and conclusions, adhering to proper citation and ethical considerations. The review findings were summarized in a comprehensive report, providing insights into the impact of homelessness on mental health based on the synthesized evidence from the selected studies.

### 3. DISCUSSION:

Homelessness is a serious social issue affecting millions worldwide [9]. In the 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR), the Department of Housing and Urban Development reported that in a single night, roughly 553,000 people experienced homelessness in the United States [10]. This is a staggering number, highlighting the necessity for this literature review.

It has been widely recognized that homelessness and mental health are closely linked [11]. This is mainly because homeless people often face various challenges such as addiction, physical disabilities, and financial hardship, which can further exacerbate mental illness, which makes mental disorders more prevalent among homeless people [12]. Studies have shown that those who experience homelessness are disproportionately affected by mental disorders compared to the general population [13]. The stressful and unpredictable nature of homelessness, coupled with exposure to violence, trauma, and social isolation, contributes to this population's vulnerability to mental health challenges.

Alcoholism and substance abuse play multiple roles in the onset and perpetuation of homelessness [14]. For some individuals, alcohol addiction can lead to a downward spiral, causing the loss of stable housing and employment [15]. Substance abuse can drain financial resources, strain relationships, and ultimately result in homelessness [14] [15]. Conversely, homelessness can exacerbate alcoholism as individuals may turn to alcohol as a coping mechanism to survive the hardships of living on the streets. Addressing both alcoholism and

homelessness requires a multifaceted approach, encompassing access to addiction treatment, housing assistance, and supportive services [16].

Suicide is another mental health challenge experienced by homeless individuals [17]. Homelessness exposes individuals to a range of stressors, including social isolation, lack of access to mental health services, and a sense of hopelessness [18]. Addressing homelessness comprehensively by providing housing stability and mental health services is essential in assisting homeless individuals who are suicidal and providing a path to recovery [18]

Another psychiatric condition experienced by the homeless population is schizophrenia. It affects over 24 million people worldwide [19] and poses a considerable problem for people without housing. The complexities of managing symptoms like visual or auditory hallucinations and delusions [20] while navigating the streets further exacerbate this disorder. Schizophrenia can be a challenging condition to treat, with relapse rates between 50 to 92% [21]. If this is further compounded by a schizophrenic patient being homeless, the prognosis for resolving this condition will drastically decrease [22]. Homeless individuals with schizophrenia face immense challenges, including limited access to mental healthcare, medication, and stable living environments [23]. Like Many other mental health disorders, schizophrenia can lead to unemployment, forcing individuals into homelessness. If proper steps are not taken, homeless individuals with schizophrenia can remain in a cycle of poverty and homelessness.

The Homeless population in America and worldwide is increasing with each passing day and has reached distressing proportions, exhibiting a concerning upward trajectory [24]. Factors such as rising housing costs, stagnant wages, and insufficient social programs have exacerbated the crisis [25]. The lack of affordable housing options and a shortage of available shelter beds have left countless individuals without a place to call home[25]. The COVID-19 pandemic has also magnified the vulnerability of marginalized communities, intensifying the struggle for stability and amplifying the urgency for comprehensive and compassionate solutions to combat the escalating homelessness crisis in America [26].

Homelessness not only impacts the prevalence of mental health disorders but also complicates their diagnosis and treatment. There is a general delay in treating medical conditions in individuals who experience homelessness [27], which can result in delayed treatment of psychiatric disorders. Homelessness disrupts the continuity of care, hindering individuals from receiving consistent treatment and follow-up for their medical and mental health needs [27]. This lack of continuity can lead to suboptimal outcomes and challenges in managing mental health disorders.

Improving the mental health of homeless individuals requires a multidimensional approach. First, we will discuss the preventative measures that help to prevent homelessness from occurring. Offering employment training and job opportunities can promote financial stability and independence [28]. Ensuring employment opportunities and support services are available to them can aid in maintaining their standard of living and offer a sense of stability [28].

There are various effective corrective measures used to address homelessness. Providing stable housing options with supportive services, including counseling and therapy, is crucial for

addressing underlying mental health issues [26]. Another essential curative measure is by collaborating with mental health care providers. This is a vital step in assisting homeless individuals battling mental health disorders [29]. By working together with mental health professionals and providing comprehensive care, individuals lead to improve their quality of living [29]. Increasing access to mental health services through outreach programs and mobile clinics can help identify and treat psychiatric disorders [26]. Enhancing social connections through support groups can promote a sense of belonging to a community and increase openness to seeking treatment. Finally, raising awareness about homelessness and various mental health disorders can help educate society and reduce the stigma associated with homelessness. Family interventions led to improvements in alcohol and drug use measures and may have impacted family cohesion and thus improved depression and substance abuse use [30].

#### **4. CONCLUSION:**

In conclusion, this review has shed more light on the significant problem homelessness poses to mental health. It also emphasizes how various psychiatric disorders, such as schizophrenia and substance abuse, can further complicate homelessness [14][23] and how homelessness hinders homeless individuals with psychiatric disorders from receiving treatment [27].

There are currently multiple government programs helping fight homelessness. More research needs to be conducted to explore the long-term impact and effectiveness of government assistance programs on improving homelessness. While government interventions such as housing assistance, addiction treatment, and supportive services aim to address the complex needs of the homeless population [18], it is essential to assess their outcomes and identify areas for improvement. Research can delve into factors such as the duration of assistance, the types of services provided, and the socioeconomic factors that influence the success of government interventions. By gaining a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of government assistance, policymakers and service providers can refine their programs to meet the needs of homeless individuals better and facilitate their journey towards stable housing, improved mental health, and overall well-being.

There is an urgent need to develop more effective interventions to prevent homelessness among individuals with mental illness. The current systems in place often fail to address the unique challenges faced by this population adequately. Implementing proactive measures that target early intervention, provide comprehensive mental health support, and ensure access to affordable and stable housing options is crucial. Developing collaborative partnerships between mental health services, housing agencies, and community organizations can facilitate a more holistic approach to homelessness prevention. Additionally, increasing public awareness, reducing stigma, and promoting empathy can foster a supportive environment that encourages early identification and intervention, ultimately leading to improved outcomes and quality of life for individuals with mental illness.

Overall, this review indicates the urgent need to prioritize mental health support and housing solutions for homeless individuals. By recognizing the close connection between homelessness and mental health, society can work towards implementing effective strategies that promote the improvement of the current condition in the mental health of the homeless population.

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