

# A Review of The Impact of Homelessness on Mental Health

## Author contribution:

The work presented in this review was a collaborative effort involving all of the authors. Each author thoroughly reviewed and granted their approval to the final manuscript.

## ABSTRACT:

**Background:** Homelessness has become a complex issue with profound impacts on society. Social determinants like housing significantly impacts human well-being in numerous ways, ranging from physical safety to appropriate access to necessities such as healthy food options and medical care. This research seeks to delve deeper into understanding how being homeless can affect mental health outcomes.

**Methodology:** A literature review conducted following a systematic method was integral to our research process. 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 evidence highlights the complex relationship between homeless status and psychological well-being, noting that lack of secure housing can trigger and exacerbate mental illness.

**Conclusion:** This review emphasizes the significance of providing homeless individuals with essential mental health aid and secure housing accommodations cannot be underscored enough. 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]. People without a home encounter countless hurdles, but their mental health is uniquely vulnerable and substantially impacted. [2].

Being homeless signifies grappling with multiple uncertainties, such as worrying about your next meal, battling to locate a safe sleeping spot, and bearing 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]. Homeless individuals endure persistent stress, which can significantly impact their overall health and potentially heighten their vulnerability to developing or intensifying mental health conditions. [4]. This is one of the many reasons why the homeless population exhibits a higher prevalence of mental health disorders when compared to their housed counterparts. [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]. Within the demographic of people impacted by homelessness in the United States, a significant proportion comprises young adults aged between 18 and 24 years old [7]. Available evidence substantiates that homelessness severely affects mental health outcomes [8]. Studies conducted have demonstrated that people experiencing homelessness show higher instances of depression and anxiety than those without housing instability issues [8]. Approximately 75% of homeless adults have had at least one form of mental illness before age 25 [7].

Homelessness undoubtedly represents one of society's persistent problems plaguing humanity today due to its complexity that comes with multiple contributory 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. Our goal with this review is to fully explore and scrutinize how being homeless can impact an individual's mental health. Also, this review explores the association between homelessness and various psychiatric disorders such as Schizophrenia, substance abuse, and depression. It also examines the challenges the homeless population faces while trying to access mental health services.

## **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. RESULTS:

A total of 67 articles were initially identified following a systematic approach. Title and abstract screening were used to remove 39 articles. The remaining 28 articles were selected for complete reading, and from these, five articles met this study's inclusion criteria. These five articles were analyzed and included in our review (Table 1).

Author/ Year	Outcome
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K. Hodgson et al. 2014 [9]	The prevalence of mental health disorders (88% Current; 93% lifetime) and mental health-associated comorbidities (73%) were higher in homeless young people. The use of mental health services by young people who are homeless was low (31%). There was a significant association between Mental health service use and homeless young people experiencing mood disorders, psychosis, and suicide risk (OR 5.21, OR 10.0, and OR 6.25, respectively) [9].
Jennifer Perry et al. 2015 [10]	Severe mental illness has a higher prevalence in homeless people compared with those who are housed. There is an increased rate of personality disorder, self-harm, and attempted suicide in the homeless population [10]
Cilia Mejia-Lancheros et al. 2020 [11]	Participants with substance dependence belonged to the moderate to high stigma trajectory group. Participants with major depressive disorder belonged to the low stigma trajectory group. Participants with suicidality and psychotic symptoms were significantly members of the moderate discrimination group [11].
Hebaat Onapa et al. 2021 [12]	<p>In this review, after housing was provided to homeless individuals, 52% reported no change in their anxiety, 31% reported a decrease in anxiety scores, and 15.5% reported an increase in anxiety scores [12].</p> <p>In geriatric individuals experiencing depression, after housing was provided for 12 months, there was a decrease in depression symptoms in 41% of them. There was also no significant decrease in depression symptoms in families who were provided housing (p= .53) [12].</p> <p>There was also a 43% decrease in suicidal ideation following housing of homeless individuals after two years (p= .03) [12]</p> <p>Overall, the impact of housing on the mental health outcomes for the homeless population was mixed and complex.</p>
Chelsea Roach et al. 2022 [13]	81% of the homeless study participants had been diagnosed with at least one psychiatric disorder. 51.9% of participants experienced difficulty in accessing prescribed psychiatric medications. Transportation and cost were selected as the most significant barriers to accessing mental health services [13].

**Table 1:** Author and outcome of selected articles

#### **4. DISCUSSION:**

There is no doubt that homelessness remains a critical social concern that affects countless individuals across the world [14]. 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 [15]. 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 [16]. 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 [17]. Studies have shown that those who experience homelessness are disproportionately affected by mental disorders compared to the general population [18]. The stressful and unpredictable nature of homelessness and exposure to violence, trauma, and social isolation contribute to this population's vulnerability to mental health challenges.

Alcoholism and substance abuse play multiple roles in the onset and perpetuation of homelessness [19]. For some individuals, alcohol addiction can lead to a downward spiral, causing the loss of stable housing and employment [20]. Substance abuse can drain financial resources, strain relationships, and ultimately result in homelessness [19] [20]. 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 [21].

Suicide is another mental health challenge experienced by homeless individuals [22]. Homelessness exposes individuals to a range of stressors, including social isolation, lack of access to mental health services, and a sense of hopelessness [23]. 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 [23]

Another psychiatric condition experienced by the homeless population is Schizophrenia. It affects over 24 million people worldwide [24] and poses a considerable problem for people without housing. The complexities of managing symptoms like visual or auditory hallucinations and delusions [25] while navigating the streets further exacerbate this disorder. Schizophrenia can be a challenging condition to treat, with relapse rates between 50 to 92% [26]. If this is further compounded by a schizophrenic patient being homeless, the prognosis for resolving this condition will drastically decrease [27]. Homeless individuals with Schizophrenia face immense challenges, including limited access to mental healthcare, medication, and stable living environments [28]. 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 [29]. Factors such as

rising housing costs, stagnant wages, and insufficient social programs have exacerbated the crisis [30]. The lack of affordable housing options and a shortage of available shelter beds have left countless individuals without a place to call home [30]. 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 [31].

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 [32], 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 [32]. 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 [33]. Ensuring employment opportunities and support services are available to them can aid in maintaining their standard of living and offer a sense of stability [33].

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 [31]. 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 [34]. By working together with mental health professionals and providing comprehensive care, individuals lead to improve their quality of living [34]. Increasing access to mental health services through outreach programs and mobile clinics can help identify and treat psychiatric disorders [31]. 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 [35].

## **5. CONCLUSION:**

In conclusion, this review has uncovered the crucial problem of homelessness and how it adversely affects mental wellness. It also emphasizes how various psychiatric disorders, such as Schizophrenia and substance abuse, can further complicate homelessness [19][28] and how homelessness hinders homeless individuals with psychiatric disorders from receiving treatment [32].

There are currently multiple government programs helping fight homelessness. Further research is required to delve deeper into government aid initiatives' lasting effects and efficacy in addressing homelessness. While government interventions such as housing assistance, addiction

treatment, and supportive services aim to address the complex needs of the homeless population [23], 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 must be an urgent need to prioritize finding solutions to the pressing problem of combatting homelessness among those afflicted with mental illness by developing effective interventions. It has been observed that the existing systems are sometimes inadequate in addressing the complex and specialized hurdles that this particular group faces. Only by taking proactive measures that prioritize early intervention, truly comprehensive mental health support programs, and accessible, stable housing will we be able to meet the pressing needs of the homeless community. It is also vital to promote collaboration between mental health services, housing agencies, and community organizations to adopt a more comprehensive strategy for preventing homelessness.

At the core of facilitating change for individuals with mental illness lies three crucial components which include increased public awareness around these conditions, reduced stigmatization via education, and promotion of empathy to develop more supportive communities. This approach encourages early detection and treatment, leading to better outcomes for individuals struggling with mental health and improving their quality of life.

In light of this review, it's evident that supporting mental health needs and providing appropriate housing options are top priorities for homeless individuals. Recognizing the crucial tie between homelessness and mental well-being highlights the urgency of crafting effective strategies that foster better outcomes in addressing this challenge and improvement of the current condition in the mental health of the homeless population.

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