Homelessness in Sacramento and Beyond

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Causes of Homelessness

- Homelessness is the result of an interaction of many factors:
  - Individuals and families are homeless primarily because they cannot afford the housing and/or
  - Do not have the safety net resources or public assistance programs, such as rental assistance and treatment services, to support them.

Causes of Homelessness

- The major structural factor linked with homelessness is poverty.
- Lack of housing is concentrated among households with income below the poverty level.
- Homeless people are extremely poor; even some who are working lack an adequate income to pay for available housing.

Causes of Homelessness

- Structural factors affecting homelessness include:
  - adverse housing and labor markets, poverty, discrimination, and family restructuring.
- Individual risk factors can include:
  - poverty, unemployment, sexual or physical abuse, family disputes and breakdowns, prison experience, substance abuse, school exclusion, and/or poor physical or mental health.
- Specific events can act as triggers for homelessness:
  - leaving home after family conflict, eviction, widowhood, leaving care or prison, a sharp deterioration in mental health, or an increase in substance misuse

Deinstitutionalization

- The 1980s saw a resurgence in homelessness with several cutbacks in federally funded programs. Thus there are some very broad processes that are at play, as well as more regional and local, such as Deinstitutionalization:
- "Without deinstitutionalization, it is unlikely there would be large numbers of homeless mentally ill."
- "Many of the mentally disturbed on the streets today are either deinstitutionalized former mental patients or younger people who would have been institutionalized in the past, but are not being so dealt with today"
- Criminalization and incarceration are an unintended consequence of deinstitutionalization

Mental Illness

- In comparison to other disability types, there is evidence that serious mental illness (SMI) generates the most negative attitudes in the general population. Historically, persons with SMI have been construed as violent and dangerous.
- Estimates range from 20 - 45% of homeless suffer from mental illness.
- Only 5 - 7% are seriously mentally ill.
- About half of those with mental illness also had substance abuse disorders, the so-called ***dually diagnosed***

Mental Illness

- The National Institute of Mental Health has provided the best epidemiological studies, finding that:
- 20-25% of homeless single adults had lifetime histories of serious mental illness
- About half had histories of alcohol abuse or dependence;
- About one-third had histories of drug abuse or dependence.
- Lifetime mental illness rates were 3-5 times greater than in the general population
- Most homeless people did not have serious mental illnesses
- Less than 15% suffer from schizophrenia.

Alcohol and Drug Use

- A study 1991 study found that 35 percent of homeless use alcohol and/or other substances heavily.
- Most of the homeless people who abuse alcohol and/or drugs live in environments that are accepting of those behaviors.
- This provides respite for harsh conditions faced on daily basis.
- They may be medicating themselves because they may be suffering from other illnesses like depression.

Alcohol and Drug Use

- Alcohol is both cause and consequence of homelessness. It is clear that alcohol, and other drug use may lead to the mismanagement of funds, evictions, and or a variety of problems that directly or indirectly contribute to the causes of homelessness today. Addiction does increase the risk of displacement for the precariously housed.

Homeless Families

- Family situations, especially the ones headed by single females, are important to recognize, as at least 30 percent of the requests for shelter by homeless families went unmet.
- Homeless families who suffer from dual diagnosis of mental illness and substance abuse problems may be the most vulnerable and at risk of repeated homelessness and victimization.

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