

HOMELESSNESS – Types and Reasons

Source: NationalHomeless.org

THREE TYPES OF HOMELESS – chronic, transitional, and episodic - follows:

CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS

- Persons most like the stereotyped profile of the “skid-row” homeless, who are likely to be entrenched in the shelter system and for whom shelters are more like long-term housing rather than an emergency arrangement. These individuals are likely to be older, and consist of the “hard-core unemployed”, often suffering from disabilities and substance abuse problems. Yet such persons represent a far smaller proportion of the population compared to the transitionally homeless.

TRANSITIONAL HOMELESSNESS

- Transitionally homeless individuals generally enter the shelter system for only one stay and for a short period. Such persons are likely to be younger, are probably recent members of the precariously housed population and have become homeless because of some catastrophic event, and have been forced to spend a short time in a homeless shelter before making a transition into more stable housing. Over time, transitionally homeless individuals will account for the majority of persons experiencing homelessness given their higher rate of turnover.

EPISODIC HOMELESSNESS

- Those who frequently shuttle in and out of homelessness are known as episodically homeless. They are most likely to be young, but unlike those in transitional homelessness, episodically homeless individuals often are chronically unemployed and experience medical, mental health, and substance abuse problems.

WHY ARE PEOPLE HOMELESS?

1. Housing - A lack of affordable housing and the limited scale of housing assistance programs have contributed to the current housing crisis and to homelessness. Recently, foreclosures have also increased the number of people who experience homelessness. The National Low Income Housing Coalition estimates that the 2013 Housing Wage is \$18.79, exceeding the \$14.32 hourly wage earned by the average renter by almost \$4.50 an hour, and greatly exceeding wages earned by low income renter households.

2. Poverty - Homelessness and poverty are inextricably linked. Poor people are frequently unable to pay for housing, food, childcare, health care, and education. Difficult choices must be made when limited resources cover only some of these necessities. Often it is housing, which absorbs a high proportion of income that must be dropped. If you are poor, you are essentially an illness, an accident, or a paycheck away from living on the streets.

In 2011, the official poverty rate was 15.0%. There were 46.2 million people in poverty.

Two factors help account for increasing poverty:

- **Lack of Employment Opportunities** – With unemployment rates remaining high, jobs are hard to find in the current economy. Even if people can find work, this does not automatically provide an escape from poverty.
- **Decline in Available Public Assistance** – The declining value and availability of public assistance is another source of increasing poverty and homelessness and many families leaving welfare struggle to get medical care, food, and housing as a result of loss of benefits, low wages, and unstable employment. Additionally, most states have not replaced the old welfare system with an alternative that enables families and individuals to obtain above-poverty employment and to sustain themselves when work is not available or possible.

Other major factors that can contribute to homelessness include:

3. Lack of Affordable Health Care – For families and individuals struggling to pay the rent, a serious illness or disability can start a downward spiral into homelessness, beginning with a lost job, depletion of savings to pay for care, and eventual eviction.

4. Domestic Violence – Battered women who live in poverty are often forced to choose between abusive relationships and homelessness. In addition, 50% of the cities surveyed by the U.S. Conference of Mayors identified domestic violence as a primary cause of homelessness (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2005).

5. Mental Illness – Approximately 16% of the single adult homeless population suffers from some form of severe and persistent mental illness (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2005).

6. Addiction – The relationship between addiction and homelessness is complex and controversial. Many people who are addicted to alcohol and drugs never become homeless, but people who are poor and addicted are clearly at increased risk of homelessness.

Who Experiences Homelessness?

Persons living in poverty are most at risk of becoming homeless, and demographic groups who are more likely to experience poverty are also more likely to experience homelessness. Yet because of methodological and financial constraints, most studies are limited to counting persons who are in shelters or on the street. While the Census Bureau has taken a series of innovations to better incorporate the homeless population, these procedures continue to undercount this group by failing to visit many locations

with homeless populations. Additionally, different governmental agencies often present different estimates/counts, making the figures on homelessness inconclusive.

Housing and Urban Development's Point-in-Time Survey, January 2013:

- HUD found 610,042 individuals to be homeless on a single night in January 2013. Most homeless persons (85%) are individuals while 15% of homeless persons are in family households.
 - 33% of all homeless people were youths under the age of 24.
 - 57,849 veterans, overwhelmingly 92% male, were homeless on a single night in January 2013. 60% were residing in shelters or transitional housing programs, while 40% were without shelter.
 - 48% of homeless individuals (without families) were found to be living without shelter.
- Families experiencing homelessness made up 50% of those who were sheltered.
- Five states, California (22%), New York (13%), Florida (8%), Texas (5%), and Massachusetts (3%), accounted for more than half of the homeless population in the United States in 2013.

Where Do People Experience Homelessness?

Homelessness is often assumed to be an urban phenomenon because homeless people are more numerous, more geographically concentrated, and more visible in urban areas. However, people experience the same difficulties associated with homelessness and housing distress in America's small towns and rural areas as they do in urban areas.

In urban areas, estimates commonly rely on counts of persons using services. However, by this measure, homeless persons in rural areas are likely substantially under-counted due to the lack of rural service sites, the difficulty capturing persons who do not use homeless services, the limited number of researchers working in rural communities, and the minimal incentive for rural providers to collect data on their clients.

Rural homelessness, like urban homelessness, is the result of poverty and a lack of affordable housing, and research has shown:

- The odds of being poor are between 1.2 to 2.3-times higher for people in non-metropolitan areas than in metropolitan areas
- 1 in 5 non-metro counties is classified as a 'high poverty' county (having a poverty rate of 20% or higher), while only 1 in 20 metro counties are defined as such
- Homeless people in rural areas are more likely to be white, female, married, currently working, homeless for the first time, and homeless for a shorter period of time