

research snapshot

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How Do the Homeless See Their Own Health Problems and Needs?

What is this research about?

There are many studies which look at the health problems that homeless people face. These studies focus on the physical and mental diseases amongst the homeless population. However, the personal views of the homeless have mostly been left out of these studies. It is important to include homeless people's opinions about their health problems and what they want to see improved.

What did the researchers do?

Dr. Isolde Daiski asked 24 homeless people in Toronto about their health and other concerns. The group consisted of nine women and 15 men. The interviews focused on how homelessness has affected the respondents and their health and what they needed to improve their health.

What you need to know:

Because the homeless have no stable housing, they are at a greater risk of developing chronic health problems than those who are housed. The social exclusion which homeless people experience every day leads to, and further reinforces, stress, addictions, and mental health problems.

What did the researchers find?

The researcher found homeless people to be suffering from many chronic health problems which are made worse by their poverty. Some of the conditions included seizure disorders, chronic respiratory disorders, arthritis, and mental distress. From their responses, it was also found that:

- Homeless people live in fear and consider social exclusion and low regard by others as the greatest threats to their health.
- Homeless people want to work, be housed, and be respected.
- Homeless people need employment, affordable and safe housing, and expanded addiction services when they are ready.

How can you use this research?

Policymakers and healthcare professionals will find this research useful in their efforts to improve the well-being of homeless people. This research illustrates that many homeless people are well aware of their health and other problems and are eager to deal with them, but face insurmountable barriers. It is important for healthcare and other workers to listen to the opinions of the homeless about how they can be helped. The most important factors in combating poor health among the homeless include greater social inclusion and availability of stable and safe housing.

Homeless shelters need to have a more welcoming atmosphere with greater safety and fewer restrictions on the lives of homeless people. Lastly, providing affordable and safe housing is the only long-term solution to the widespread health problems of the homeless.

About the Researcher

Dr. Isolde Daiski is an Assistant Professor at York University's Faculty of Health School of Nursing. This Research Snapshot is from her project, "Perspectives of homeless people on their health needs priorities".

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