

research snapshot

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Beating Homelessness Is About More Than Just Getting Housing

What is this research about?

Homelessness is a serious issue in Canada. While getting housing is seen as the biggest challenge for those on the streets, people who are homeless face a number of other difficulties. Research shows that most homeless people experience bouts of homelessness with some forms of housing in between. There is a set of complex factors which determines a person's exit and entrance from homelessness.

What did the researcher do?

The researchers conducted a longitudinal survey of 120 participants who were homeless at baseline in the Windsor area; and in-depth qualitative interviews with 22 participants selected from the sample of 120 participants. After one year, 71 participants from the original sample of 120 participants were successfully tracked and interviewed for the second time.

What did the researcher find?

The researchers grouped their findings into four broad categories:

What you need to know:

While getting housing is central to solving homelessness, there needs to be an overall improvement in healthcare, education, and social assistance for the poor.

1. Homelessness dynamics – most homeless experience periods of housing but are forced to return to the streets. Researchers found that at baseline, participants had been homeless (without regular housing) in their lifetime an average of 3 times. They also reported being homeless a further 2 times on average between the baseline and follow-up interviews.
2. Youth homelessness – homeless youth are more likely to become homeless due to family troubles and being involved with the law. A significantly larger proportion of youth cited trouble with the family (70%) and trouble with the law or being arrested (25%) compared to their adult counterparts.
3. Multiple vulnerabilities and homelessness – A number of vulnerabilities like poverty, lack of affordable housing, low education levels and unemployment cause people to become homeless or fall back into homelessness. The

factors leading to homelessness differ on the basis of age, gender, race, and sex. A much larger number of females reported having been physically/sexually abused or having witnessed abuse.

4. System failures and homelessness – the researchers found that the social assistance available isn't enough to prevent people from becoming homeless or to help people quickly exit homelessness. For examples, many homeless youth from the study were on the street because the system wasn't able to manage their development through foster homes.

How can you use this research?

There is no simple solution to homelessness. Policymakers and community groups can use this research to better understand the multiple factors causing people to end up on the street. Policymakers will also benefit from the first-hand accounts by homeless people of how they see the issue from their point of view. The researchers argue that to address youth homelessness, a city needs a planning process that doesn't just bring mainstream homeless assistance providers, but also the mainstream provincial and local agencies and organizations that frequently come in contact with clients who are at risk of homelessness. These organizations include the Children's Aid Society, the School Board, Mental Health and Addiction services.

About the Researcher

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Knowledge Mobilization at York

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