

About Homelessness

By ReadWorks



Homelessness is an issue that affects people of every age and from every country. If you walk down the street in many big cities in the United States, you might notice people sleeping on the sidewalk or begging for food or money. These individuals are very visible to passersby, and it is difficult to ignore them. But there are also homeless people who do not sleep on the streets. They are not as visible to the public eye, but they are also homeless. These people often spend their nights sleeping in shelters, which provide food, rooms, and often a variety of social services (like daycare). We might not see these people on the streets, but it does not mean that they aren't suffering.

When thinking about homelessness, one of the first questions that might come to mind is: why are people homeless? People become homeless for a variety of reasons, often outside of their own personal control. Two key reasons have been identified on why people become homeless. The first is a lack of affordable housing. The second is poverty, or the condition of being poor. The government is usually responsible for providing affordable housing to people and families in need. It builds large apartment buildings or housing developments for people who cannot afford to live elsewhere. Sometimes there is not enough affordable housing for all the people who need it. Those who are unable to secure housing may become homeless.

Homelessness and poverty are quite clearly linked. Poor people must often choose between such important things as buying food or paying for medical care versus paying the rent. When poor people are faced with these difficult decisions, housing is often the first

expense to be dropped because it generally requires the most amount of money. Many of the homeless in America are simply unable to find jobs due to a lack of opportunity. Others are mentally ill or addicted to drugs. Still others who are homeless have previously relied on public assistance but have lost that assistance for one reason or another. An example of a public assistance program is The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which provides help for people who struggle to afford healthy and nutritious food.

There are three distinct kinds of homelessness. The first is called *chronic homelessness*, and it represents the group of people who move from shelter to shelter in a seemingly never-ending cycle. Often, the chronically homeless are older, and often suffer from disabilities or addiction.

The second type of homelessness is called *transitional homelessness*, and it describes people who must enter a shelter for a short period of time. For example, if they are evicted from their homes for not being able to pay the rent, they might go into a shelter or enter government-based transitional housing. They may live there for up to two years until they are able to get back on their feet.

The third kind of homeless is called *episodic homelessness*, which accounts for people who move in and out of shelters at various points throughout their life. Those who experience episodic homelessness usually have difficulty maintaining steady employment. People who are considered transitionally homeless and those who are episodically homeless are often young.

Homelessness rises when people are unable to find or keep jobs. But it also affects people who are not even employed in the first place: children under sixteen years old. As minors, they are not legally allowed to work. According to the National Center on Family Homelessness, one in every 45 children experiences homelessness each year. Most families that experience homelessness are made up of a mother and her children. The National Center on Family Homelessness reports that 29 percent of adults in homeless families in the United States are working. Yet the wages are often not enough to support the various needs of a family, like healthcare, food, and shelter. Furthermore, many families try to stay out of shelters. Shelters can be noisy, overcrowded, and stressful places for both children and parents. These families would often rather stay at the homes of friends or relatives, or even sleep in their cars. Families that experience homelessness in any situation are under a ton of stress, due to the lack of stability and privacy.

There are no simple solutions to this major social issue. But homelessness affects too many people around the world to be ignored.