**Homelessness and Substance Abuse**

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Course

Date

Homelessness is one of the intense forms of social exclusion. It severely affects the mental and physical health of people, limiting their quality of life as well as access to critical socio-economic factors such as employment opportunities and healthcare services. Homelessness defines people without a stable, acceptable and permanent house or individuals who lack the ability to acquire them. One common stereotype about homeless individuals is that they are commonly drug abusers. This is because individuals who abuse drugs tend to face mental, social and physical challenges, thereby raising their risks of acquiring stable homes. **Drug abuse represents both a cause and a result of homelessness, often leading to homelessness or a rise in drug use when people lose their homes.**

Substance use disorder is a common phenomenon among homeless people. A study by Schutz (2016) investigates 500 homeless people living in British Columbia. Among the people surveyed, 78% of the respondents suffered from at least one form of substance abuse, while 68% suffered from at least a mental disorder. Schutz (2016) acknowledges that findings from the study significantly relate to previous studies that linked homelessness and drug use. Indeed, drug use disorder represents one of the major risk factors for homelessness among populations around the world.

Sustained substance misuse plays a central role in promoting homelessness among populations. Through persistent drug abuse, an individual might fail to perform effectively at work (Nicholls & Urada, 2016). This practice might eventually lead to job loss as a result leading to chronic unemployment. In turn, it makes it difficult for a person to pay for housing and other rental services, thereby leading to foreclosures, evictions and eventually homelessness. Besides, substance addiction might exacerbate the prevailing financial issues, leading to the loss of housing as well (Schutz, 2016). These phenomena explain how the severity of drug use plays a role in promoting homelessness.

Lack of support and loss of loved ones significantly heightens drug addiction. People who have not experienced homelessness or any housing insecurity tend to believe that drug addiction precedes homeless. However, this is typically not the case. Just as Bauer (2016) suggests, drug addiction and substance abuse can play a role in destroying a person's relationship with their support networks and loved ones. Indeed, this might entirely take over a person's life; as a result, they may miss their normal way of life that incorporates family and work life. In turn, a person might prioritize drugs over paying rent and mortgages. In this case, people who are financially struggling exhibit a higher risk of being homeless as a result of drug addiction (Bauer, 2016). Social support plays an important role in mitigating drug abuse and, consequently, homelessness.

Breaking substance addiction can be significantly challenging, especially for abusers who are homeless. According to Ickowicz et al. (2017), at first, the motivation for a person to stop drug use might be poor because of the aspect of homelessness. Ideally, for a majority of homeless individuals, survival is a key aspect instead of personal growth (Bauer, 2016). Therefore, they tend to consider finding shelter and food to be critical as compared to finding drug counseling that would lead to the end of their addiction. Schutz (2016) suggests that seeking drug counseling services and other kinds of support is a primary step toward breaking the addiction cycle. Unless proper intervention is undertaken, this cycle leads to sustained drug abuse and the prevalence of homelessness.

Additionally, a majority of homeless people lack social support. Nicholls Urada (2016) suggests that this occurs because the aspect of homelessness tends to make them estranged from their families and friends. This leads to increased drug use, a coping mechanism for homelessness. Ideally, one of the key components for ending drug use entails having proper social support that includes friends and family members. Without social support, recovering from substance abuse can be significantly challenging (Polcin, 2016). However, even when one breaks from their addiction, a homeless person might find it challenging to remain sober since they essentially live on the streets where drugs are readily available and widely used. Unfortunately, a majority of treatment programs are centered on breaking the drug abuse cycle, which is essentially ineffective as it does not sufficiently address the possibility of a relapse.

Among several homeless people, substance use and abuse tend to co-occur with an individual's mental health. According to Ickowicz et al. (2017), individuals with mental illness use street drugs as a form of self-medication. In essence, this makes people exhibiting both mental illness and substance disorders exhibit an additional obstacle toward recovery. Besides, this combination also contributes to an increased risk of victimization and violence while consequently contributing to cycles between jails, streets and emergency rooms (Ickowicz et al., 2017). Besides, they are also unable to get treatment facilities that would aid their recovery process. This occurs because several programs for homeless people with mental illness tend to admit individuals with drug abuse disorders, while on the other hand, programs for homeless drug abusers tend not to admit people with mental illness. These contribute to the prevalence of homelessness among populations.

Additionally, homeless people who are suffering from mental illness tend to have a high likelihood of being victims of assault and sexual abuse. Re-occurrence of abuse makes these people drug dependent as they find comfort in the harmful substances they consume (Ickowicz et al., 2017). Indeed, people suffering from severe emotional and mental conditions would find it significantly convenient to self-medicate through harmful drugs. The dual diagnosis that incorporates mental disorders and drug use explains the high rate of homelessness in the United States despite various affordable housing programs (Bauer, 2016). Although it might seem that challenging emotional and mental conditions can be curtailed through drug and substance abuse, it actually initiates a destructive cycle of dependency, poor socio-economic state and homelessness.

Socio-economic factors play a central role in promoting both substance abuse and homelessness. Schutz (2016) suggests that poverty, coupled with a lack of employment opportunities, is one of the major causes of homelessness and substance abuse in the United States. Lack of financial resources tends to limit people from accessing education and quality healthcare. Schutz (2016) suggests that the overall lack of opportunities raises the risk of a person resorting to substance abuse as a coping mechanism, especially when one is faced with the realities associated with a lack of job opportunities. Evidently, an individual will be unable to pay mortgages and rent, thereby leading to the prevalence of homelessness.

Since drug abuse represents both a cause and a result of homelessness, these issues need to be simultaneously addressed. Nicholls and Urada (2021) point out that the provision of stable housing both during and after treatment lowers the risk of an addict's relapse. Combatting drug abuse on its own is ineffective as chances for a relapse are relatively high. Therefore, these interventions need to be combined with proper housing opportunities that would ensure that people with an addiction have stable homes. Besides, housing programs need to incorporate services including individual mental health treatment, education as well as provision of employment opportunities (Nicholls & Urada, 2021). These programs also need to incorporate outreach programs and peer support that would ensure the homeless and addicts are able to reintegrate themselves into the community effectively. In essence, it will play a central in enabling drug abusers to re-establish their residential stability.

The prevalence of homelessness and substance abuse in America is attributed to the inability of these people to receive quality care. According to Polcin (2016), a majority of the homeless and addicts in the United States tend to seek care, but they do not receive it. One key factor that leads to this entails the high costs associated with health care services. Addicts and the homeless lack health insurance coverage, making access to these critical services unattainable. Lack of documentation, long waiting lists and lack of transportation services are other key factors that significantly affect access to care among the homeless and drug addicts (Schutz et al., 2016). Notably, homeless addicts have unique problems as compared to housed addicts. Therefore, this explains why existing programs for rehabilitation need to be enhanced to ensure that there exists access to care among homeless addicts.

In conclusion, homelessness and drug abuse represent a vicious cycle that is influenced by multiple factors. However, it is evident that drug abuse represents a cause of homelessness as well as a result of homelessness. An increase in homelessness can lead to drug use, and on the other hand, an increase in drug use can lead to homelessness. This interplay explains why it is critical for relevant stakeholders to embrace a holistic approach that is aimed at addressing both drug use and homelessness. These can include the provision of affordable houses, viable addiction treatment programs, employment opportunities as well and mental health services. By addressing these issues, the link between substance abuse and homelessness can be sufficiently addressed.

References

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