



The Feminization of Homelessness

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The feminization of homelessness refers to the increasing number of women in poverty compared to men due to social and economic barriers that contribute to the oppression of women. For instance, some of these barriers include wage discrimination, women's tendency to be employed in lower paying occupations, exposure to domestic abuse and/or intimate partner violence, and blocked access to health care and affordable housing. While the leading cause of poverty among women is lack of income, the systematic gender discrimination experienced by women exacerbates their struggles and ultimately contributes to homelessness in women.

Mothers are among the most affected by poverty, as families with children make up about a third of the homeless population, and three quarters of those families are female led as opposed to male led (U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2018). Single mother households are at the greatest risk for experiencing homelessness, and the average homeless family with children is

comprised of a single mother and two children under the age of 6 (U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness).

The traditional view of motherhood propagates the idea of mothers as the primary nurturers and caregivers to their children, and it is no surprise, then, that mothers are more likely to take on more responsibilities related to raising children than fathers. Many single mothers do not pursue higher education, and therefore their opportunities to get high paying jobs to support their families are lower than men's, therefore contributing to their risk of becoming homeless. Additionally, women are more likely to be financially dependent on their partner, and so more likely to experience financial instability as the result of losing a partner, whether that be through divorce or death of their spouse (Bullock et al., 836). Mothers are also more likely to take on primary care of the children after a divorce, which contributes to the numbers of children in poverty.

Experiencing intimate partner violence contributes to rates of homelessness among single mothers, as well as among women in general. Women who are victims of intimate partner violence are at a greater risk for becoming homeless in the future, with more than 80% of homeless women with children reporting that they had experienced domestic violence (U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2018). Additionally, between 22-57% of homeless mothers who experienced abuse identified as the direct cause for their homelessness, and women who have experienced violence within the past year are at four times greater risk of becoming homeless (U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2018). While past experiences of abuse increase the likelihood of a woman to become homeless, experiencing homelessness quadruples the chance of a woman becoming the victim of physical or sexual violence (U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, 2018).

Intimate partner violence comes in many forms, and women often suffer financial abuse at the hands of their partners, as well as physical violence. Economic abuse can limit women's access economic resources, therefore preventing her from being able to provide for herself and forcing her to remain reliant on her abuser (Bullock et al., 837). Economic abuse can include stealing or controlling assets, preventing the victim from obtaining an education or job, and neglecting childcare costs, therefore forcing their partner to financially support their child on their own. Women who suffer from economic abuse are at an increased risk for homelessness because they are often forced into a position in which they are not able to independently support themselves or their children.

Works Cited

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