

Advocacy Weekly Wrap

ISSUE 5: DECEMBER 3, 2020

ISSUE SPOTLIGHT: Stigmas Associated with Homelessness

There are many misconceptions about individuals experiencing homelessness.

These stigmas can get in the way of having open and understanding discussions about issues surrounding homelessness. They can even have [legal implications](#) as judicial judges may combine case issues with false stigmas held against individuals experiencing homelessness, as seen in the wide criminalization of homelessness. To address these problems, here are 5 commonly held misconceptions and information that debunks them:

1. **"Bad choices" lead to homelessness.**
 - Homelessness is not necessarily the direct result of personal choices. Many [factors](#) contribute to an individual's experience of homeless that aren't under that person's realm of control. Some include:
 - Sudden illness or injury
 - Sudden loss of employment
 - Eviction
 - Domestic Abuse
 - Coping with mental illness or substance abuse
2. **People experiencing homelessness are lazy and should just get a job.**
 - Individuals who experience homelessness must [struggle on a daily basis just to find the essentials to survive](#). Many people that hold this misconception simply fail to consider the many obstacles that homeless individuals face while surviving on the streets and trying to find a job.
 - Factors, like not having a permanent address and not having regular access to showers or transportation, make finding a job extremely difficult. Many homeless individuals also have criminal histories (often due to the unfair criminalization of homelessness) which can raise red flags to employers who perform background checks.
 - Even if a part-time or minimum wage job is acquired, this may not be enough to hold permanent housing because of the [affordable housing crisis](#).
3. **All people who experience homelessness are addicts.**
 - Although there are some homeless individuals who do have substance abuse problems, there are still many that don't. According to [Michael's House](#), approximately 38% of homeless individuals abuse alcohol and 26% abuse drugs other than alcohol. These numbers represent a minority portion of the overall homeless population.
 - [Substance abuse is rarely the sole cause of homelessness and is more often a response to it](#) because of increased exposure to dealers and users while living on the streets. Also, mental illness is often an underlying cause of addiction which should be accounted for when considering these issues.
4. **Homeless individuals are criminals and violent people.**
 - A person who is homeless is [no more likely to be a criminal](#) than a housed person, with the exception of laws that criminalize homelessness. These laws penalize people for doing things that are imperative to those who do not have access to housing, like sleeping in public places, loitering, public urination, panhandling, etc.
 - In regards to violence, a person who is homeless is actually less likely to perpetuate a violent crime than a housed person, and is in fact [more likely to be the victim of a violent crime](#), especially if they are a homeless woman, teen, or child
5. **There are already enough programs and services to help homeless individuals.**
 - Many solutions and support programs for homelessness focus on [emergency services](#) (like shelters or food banks) that are not directed towards people who are experiencing long-term cycles of homelessness. For a more effective solution to be reached, there needs to be more focus on larger systemic factors, like the affordable housing crisis and the criminalization of homelessness.

LEARN MORE

Study: ["Criminality and Homeless Men: An Empirical Assessment"](#) (Snow, Baker, Anderson)

Webinar: ["The Abyss: Addiction, Homelessness, and Trauma"](#) focuses on how trauma in early life can lead to substance abuse and homelessness which helps to explain how drug addiction is not always just a "bad, personal decision." (National Health Care for the Homeless Council)

Article: ["Overcoming Employment Barriers"](#) (National Alliance to End Homelessness)

Podcast: ["Episode 5: Assembly Line Justice"](#) examines how the criminalization of homelessness feeds into the revolving door effect (from the last newsletter!) and can explain how the "criminal" stigma around homeless individuals is not from differences in criminal behavior but from systematic issues in the criminal justice system. (NPR)

ACTION ITEMS:

- **Talk to the people in your life about the misconceptions about homelessness (0.5 hour):**
 - Text or call three friends or family members that may hold these misconceptions or don't know a lot about homelessness and share this newsletter with them and/or have a conversation with them about what you learned from the "Learn More" articles.
- **Watch a webinar on COVID-19 and homelessness and attend our discussion event! (2 hours):**
 - Watch [this panel](#) that was organized by Bruin Shelter about the effects of COVID-19 on homelessness and the housing crisis. Then, come to our discussion event that will be held via Zoom on **December 20th at 6 PM PST**. We'll be talking about the panel content and also discussing issues of homelessness relating to the panel and previous newsletter topics! If you plan on attending, please fill out [this google form](#) and we will email the meeting link to you.
 - If you can't make it to the discussion event, you can still earn hours by watching the panel and submitting a written reflection (~1 page) under the task description question on the service hours form.

Thank you so much for reading! If you found this informative, please share! If you would like to subscribe, [click here](#).

HP Members: If you have completed action items and would like to report them for hours, please complete [this form](#) (also available on the "Members" page of the Hunger Project Website).

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