

The Importance of Combating Homelessness

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PSYCH 1000

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December 8, 2023

The Homeless population in Casper Wyoming is a pressing real-life issue that demands attention and solutions. While the population of the state remains the smallest in the country, the ratio of homeless people to those with homes stays persistently disproportionate. Wyoming's homeless rate is a little over 11%, ranking the 24th state when it comes to the highest homeless population (Stebbins, 2023). After finding out this information, the question remains, what are some of the root causes of homelessness in Wyoming? After a significant amount of time spent researching, I found there were a few reasons. Mental health challenges, economic instability, and family or relationship conflicts are all key factors of homelessness. Family or relationship conflicts are issues that are oftentimes overlooked when researching this topic, this was something I hadn't considered before stumbling upon it.

Mental health challenges cause what could be compared to a snowball effect. When an individual suffers from mental illness they oftentimes have difficulty maintaining a job. This can lead to financial instability, making it impossible to keep up with bills and eventually losing a home. " Even if individuals do try to seek help, access to mental health services is often limited for those without stable housing" (Back on My Feet, 2023). In the article *Causes of Homelessness: What You Need to Know*, it discusses the stigma around seeking help for mental illness. It's important to note the challenges mentally ill, homeless individuals face when trying to become functioning members of society again. Furthermore, if an individual were to succeed in obtaining proper mental health care and even a place of employment, they still face the challenge of finding affordable housing. "A 2021 study by the University of Chicago estimated that '53% of people living in homeless shelters and 40% of unsheltered people were employed, either

full or part-time' (Back on My Feet, 2023). This statistic proves the common belief of homeless people being "lazy" or not wanting to make their situation better to be a false statement.

Equally important, the number of individuals who become homeless due to family and relationship conflicts remains a significant contributing factor. Domestic abuse survivors are excellent examples of this given that when escaping a situation in which your life is being threatened, there is often nowhere for these individuals to go before finding a shelter sometimes days later. This was an issue that I hadn't considered playing such a big role in the contribution to the homeless population before this research.

"Rates of unsheltered homelessness -- which includes those sleeping on the streets, in abandoned buildings, and in wooded areas -- are also on the rise" (Stebbins, 2023). All of these factors feed into the reality of this growing issue. While there are institutions in place such as the Wyoming Rescue Mission, it is apparent that there is more work to be done.

Sources

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