

Homelessness cannot be solved without tackling trauma, new research reveals

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As a society we cannot hope to end homelessness unless we first address the trauma that many homeless people have suffered throughout their lives—that is the headline finding of a new report "Tackling Trauma,

Ending Homelessness."

Commissioned by homelessness charity Oasis Community Housing and based on research by Northumbria University academics Dr. Adele Irving and Dr. Jamie Harding, the report reveals that 94% of people facing homelessness who were surveyed have experienced one or more traumas that have left them unable to access the help they need.

Furthermore, half of people facing homelessness have experienced at least five or more traumas, such as sexual or domestic abuse, violence, family death or war.

The researchers found that each trauma increased the risk of mental ill-health, lack of self-care, substance misuse and the inability to concentrate or learn, and homelessness. The effects of these traumas, when unaddressed, also impact people's capacity to access or properly manage tenancies, creating a vicious cycle of homelessness.

In compiling the report, the Northumbria research team analyzed the results of a survey carried out among over 100 Oasis Community Housing residents and examined data collected through the nationwide Fulfilling lives: Supporting people experiencing multiple disadvantage program.

They concluded that a single incident of trauma can have a profound effect on the well-being of an individual, but multiple events or "complex trauma" are highly likely to pervade every aspect of a person's being. It is this complex trauma that is identified as a defining factor for people who fall into homelessness.

Speaking about the research, Dr. Harding said, "The impact of trauma has been an increasingly important theme in homelessness research in recent years and there is a growing realization that, for the majority of people for whom homeless is a longer-term issue, trauma is always there

in the background of their lives, whether that is from childhood, adolescence, as an adult, or throughout their whole lives."

The research provides evidence that specialist mental health and timely trauma-informed support offers a real chance to end cycles of homelessness. However, almost half of people surveyed had not been able to access specialist help for their trauma and some reported only being "taken seriously" after reaching a crisis point.

The report concludes that establishing trauma-informed care as best practice across the homelessness and related sectors would likely drive real change in the lives for those experiencing homelessness, as well as providing significant broader social and economic benefits.

As Dr. Irving explained, "One important finding which came out of the research is the value of a trauma-informed approach to service delivery which is mindful of the traumatic experiences someone has gone through. This isn't about creating new services. There are already housing, mental health, and substance misuse services available. However, we need to ask why some individuals are unable to access or engage with those services and why some are returning to those services again and again. But a trauma informed approach may be key to making it easier for those who need support to access those services."

David Smith is CEO of the charity Oasis Community Housing, which commissioned the report. He said, "It is futile to try to solve the issue of homelessness without addressing the trauma people have suffered. Frontline staff working in homelessness services must have trauma-informed training to offer appropriate support, as well as helping to protect themselves from vicarious trauma. A national trauma-informed training program, delivered by Government, would save lives as well as taxpayers' pounds."

"We saw a concerted effort to put a roof over every rough sleepers' head during the pandemic, but only by recognizing and committing to tackle the [trauma](#) that is deep-rooted within our [homeless population](#) can we even begin to hope to end entrenched homelessness in this country."

More information: A summary of the findings can be found at www.oasiscommunityhousing.org/trauma-homelessness

Provided by Northumbria University

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