

Male Homelessness



Executive Summary

Homelessness is defined as when an individual lacks a fixed nighttime residency. While any individual can experience homelessness, it is commonly reported that the homeless population mostly consists of single males. A combination of structural or situational changes (e.g., economic recession, high unemployment rates, housing costs), societal perceptions, and various personal circumstances (e.g., mental health, substance abuse, incarceration) can add degrees of complexity to a homeless individual's situation. Efforts to help people who are homeless may involve providing resources beyond housing, such as supporting community integration and workforce participation.

Highlights

- Statewide, 55.8% of homeless persons are men. However, this proportion varies depending on the geographical area.
- Mental health and substance abuse disorders affect 20% of Missourians experiencing homelessness.
- There is a link between homelessness and incarceration; homeless individuals are more likely to be repeat offenders for low-level offenses.
- Service programs that emphasize housing and employment have the potential to reduce homelessness and break the homelessness-jail cycle while reducing taxpayer burdens for associated services such as emergency room visits.

Limitations

- Existing data provides a snapshot of people experiencing homelessness and does not capture everybody who experienced homelessness over the course of a year.
 - The 2020 *Report for the Balance of State Continuum of Care* gives insight to the demographics of rural homelessness, accounting for only 24% of the homeless population. Most recent reports for the remaining seven *Continuum of Care*s are not yet available.
 - These data were collected in January 2020, the coldest time of the year, to be a conservative estimate of those who are homeless with no other housing options.
 - These data were collected before COVID-19 was declared a national public health emergency. The data presented does not reflect potential housing changes caused by the pandemic.
- These data do not provide statistics that combine multiple demographic categories, such as race and gender. It is not possible to conclude which subgroups are most affected by homelessness (e.g., black males) in Missouri beyond *either* race or gender.

Research Background

For more general information on homelessness, please see the previously published Science Note: [Homelessness in Missouri](#).

Male Homelessness in Missouri

Between 2018 and 2020, homelessness in Missouri increased by approximately 11% to a total of 6,527 individuals experiencing homelessness.^{1,2} The most recent demographic data on homeless populations comes from the January 2020 *Balance of State Continuum of Care (CoC)*.^a This data indicates that rural homelessness accounts for 24% of the Missouri homeless population. These data do not include homelessness in urban areas. In the *Balance of State CoC*, rural homelessness increased by 16.5% from 2018 and equally affected males and females.³ In terms of race and ethnicity, 16% were Black and 78% were White.³ Given that 76% of the Missouri population experiencing homelessness resides in urban areas, and that demographics in these urban areas differ from rural demographics, these data cannot necessarily be extrapolated to draw statewide conclusions.⁴

Based on the 2019 *Missouri Statewide Homeless Study*, which includes data from urban CoCs, 55.8% of homeless persons were men. However, this proportion varies by geographical areas. In St. Louis area counties, approximately 55% percent of homeless persons were women.⁵ Of those experiencing homelessness, 64% were single individuals and 36% were individuals in families.⁵ Individual homelessness has increased by 9% whereas family homelessness has remained consistent over the last two years.^{1,2} With regards to race and ethnicity, 40% of individuals experiencing homelessness were Black.⁵ Since 11% of the Missourian population is Black, Black Missourians are over 5 times more likely to be homeless than White Missourians.⁴

While national data reports 70% of homeless individuals are men, these same data also indicate that men are slightly more likely than women to experience unsheltered homelessness with variances between states.² Individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness increased by 26.3% between in Missouri 2018 and 2020.^{1,2} There are roughly 65 homeless shelters throughout the state, with some locations providing for men only -- however the percentage of male-only shelters is not available.⁶ In addition to providing a temporary safe place, shelters provide referrals for support and rehabilitation programs.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health

Mental illness and substance use disorders are significant public health issues affecting individuals experiencing homeless. Individuals may experience more than one of these conditions;⁷⁻⁹ the 2019 *Missouri Homelessness Study* indicates that mental health illness and/or substance use disorders affect 20% of homeless Missourians.⁵ A study of substance-abusing homeless men found that they had higher than average rates of stressful life experiences and traumatic events. In fact, those who grew up within an unstable family life where substance abuse

^aContinuum of Care (COC): The Governor's Committee to End Homelessness implemented 8 CoCs across the state to have a developed strategy to prevent homelessness whenever possible; if it cannot be prevented, then the experience should be rare, brief, and non-recurring.

and stressful life experiences occurred regularly are more likely to have both substance abuse and mental health disorders later in life.⁶ Mental illness and substance abuse are associated with increased emergency and medical costs, which are more costly forms of health care than standard outpatient care.

Programs like Housing First, which helps homeless individuals find immediate housing, remove barriers to housing and supportive services without prerequisites for sobriety or psychiatric treatment. Research has demonstrated that participation in these programs is associated with reduced hospital visits and the associated costs, successful community reintegration, and reduction in homelessness.¹⁰

Homelessness and Incarcerations

There is a link between male homelessness and incarceration. In general, homeless individuals are more likely to be arrested for nonviolent offenses such as trespassing, loitering, and acquiring inhabitable living spaces (e.g., park benches).¹¹ These are often referred to as “quality of life” crimes. Homeless individuals are more likely to be repeat offenders for these low-level offenses, especially for those who are unsheltered. A recent survey of 441 homeless individuals conducted in Denver, Colorado showed approximately 70% of police officer-homeless individual interactions resulted in a citation, and 36% resulted in incarceration.¹² Additionally, 10% of police and homeless encounters resulted in referral to social services and 5% resulted in calling outreach workers.¹²

Approaches for Re-entry Programs

Re-entry programs that emphasize housing have the potential to break the homelessness-jail cycle. The 2016 *Denver Supportive Housing Social Impact Bond Initiative* (Denver SIB) aimed to increase housing stability and decrease jail stays among homeless individuals using a “Housing First” approach, which prioritizes permanent housing for those experiencing homelessness. The program reduced people’s interactions with the criminal justice system with a 34% reduction in police contacts and 40% reduction in subsequent arrests. The program also resulted in decreased net costs to taxpayers for other associated public services (~\$8.6 million), including emergency room visits.¹³

Criminal records can be a barrier to obtaining housing and employment; those who experience homelessness with a criminal record may experience homelessness for longer periods of time.^{14,15} Most re-entry programs help individuals find housing before employment. However, research suggests that facilitating employment early is an underutilized yet also effective practice for preventing homelessness and increasing self-sufficiency.^{16,17}

References

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