

Homelessness and Trauma

Rebecca Lorick, MPA

Director of My Sister's Place Women's Center and Lodge



Myth or Fact?

The leading causes of homelessness in America are mental illness and substance use.

MYTH



Fact

- **Mental Illness and substance use are major factors associated with homelessness. These can be a cause and/or effect.**
- **My Sister's Place Women's Center**
 - Over a 17 month period, 56% of those new clients self-reported living with mental illness
 - 20% self-reported substance use



Why are people homeless?

- **Lack of Affordable Housing**
- **Unemployment or Underemployed**
- **Domestic Violence**
- **Housing Discrimination**
- **Inadequate access to affordable healthcare, including behavioral health and substance use treatment services**



Myth or Fact?

Most individuals experiencing homelessness live on the streets.

MYTH



Fact: Most are sheltered.

According to the 2017 Point In Time (PIT) count:

- **65% of persons counted were sheltered**
- **35% were unsheltered**

Source: <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2017-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>



What feeds into this myth?

- **Perceptions of homelessness**
 - Example: Unaccompanied youth couch surfing
- **Visible vs. invisible**
 - Example: Rural homelessness
- **PIT numbers are under reported.**
 - Snapshot of homelessness on one night



Who experiences homelessness?

The 2017 PIT Count revealed 553,742 individuals in the US were experiencing homelessness.

	Total People Counted	Single Individuals	Families with Children
2017 PIT Count Results	553,742	369,081	184,661

2,669 were counted in Baltimore City

Source: <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2017-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>



CATHOLIC CHARITIES BALTIMORE

CHERISHING THE DIVINE WITHIN ALL

Faces of Homelessness?



DIGNITY

COMPASSION

HUMILITY

COLLABORATION

EXCELLENCE

INTEGRITY

Working with the homeless

Scenario

- 16 year old runaway from middle class home
- Pregnant
- Living in substandard conditions with her boyfriend
- Support system: mostly juveniles involved in the criminal justice system
- Poor attendance in school. When attending, sleeps in class and does not complete work.
- When approached about her “poor” choices, she is defensive and verbally aggressive.



Initial Perceptions versus Reality...

- Ran away from a broken home
- Involved with a boyfriend who was initially helping her flee. Once she left home, her boyfriend began verbally, physically, and sexually abusing her.
- Family questioned why she stayed and did not report the abuse.
- She skipped school to hide the bruises, poor hygiene, depression, and anxiety.
- She was afraid of failure.



The Journey...



CATHOLIC CHARITIES BALTIMORE

CHERISHING THE DIVINE WITHIN ALL

Effects of Trauma

Traumatized

Depression

Anxiety

Physical symptoms

Untrusting

Irritability

Up

Control

Hypervigilant

DIGNITY

COMPASSION

HUMILITY

COLLABORATION

EXCELLENCE

INTEGRITY

SAMHSA's Principles of a Trauma-Informed Approach

- **Safe** → **Physically/psychologically**
- **Trustworthy** → **Authenticity/Confidentiality**
- **Peer Support** → **Sharing stories**
- **Collaboration** → **Person Centered**
- **Empower** → **Strength based/Always optional**
- **Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues** → **Removing stereotypes**

<https://www.samhsa.gov/homelessness-programs-resources>



Myth or Fact?

Asking “What happened to you” rather than “What’s wrong with you” can be beneficial in reaching someone who seems unreachable.

FACT



What can you do to make a difference?

