

## The Causes of Homelessness

Homelessness is a huge problem in Australia and all around the world. There has long been a stigma surrounding homelessness, a misunderstanding about the causes and circumstances that lead to someone being homeless. These misunderstandings also cause many to lack awareness about just how difficult it is to break the cycle of homelessness once someone finds themselves stuck within it. The causes of homelessness are more complicated than you may think. This essay explores the different circumstances that lead to someone becoming homeless.

The cycle of homelessness refers to the near impossibility of overcoming homelessness because of the lack of control over multiple aspects of a person's life and the lack of resources that person has to gain control. Paddy McQueen, a youth development worker at launch housing Victoria explains the cycle of homelessness by saying, "If they [a homeless person] are trying to get on top of one aspect of their life, something else falls through the gaps. For example, if they are young, they might be trying to get their education in line, but if they are trying to get their education they aren't focusing on employment, so that falls through the gaps and continues the cycle. If they are somehow on top of their employment and education then they aren't on top of their civil participation and social connections or their health and well-being". It's clear to see that the circumstances that lead to homelessness are much more complex than most people believe. The stigma around homelessness includes assumptions that all homeless people are alcoholics and drug addicts and that they are lazy and unmotivated. This stigma is caused by the lack of understanding and empathy that the public has for the homeless and this can only be changed by educating ourselves and each other about the causes of homelessness.

One of the main causes of homelessness in Australia (and the biggest cause in Victoria) is domestic violence. 1 in 6 women have either experienced or been threatened with sexual or physical violence by a partner. Domestic violence is violent, abusive or bullying behaviour or actions towards a partner or former partner to scare or control them. For many women who are experiencing domestic violence, their only option is to seek help from homelessness services as they might not have the resources to support themselves. This is often the case when their partner is especially controlling and withholds access to finances or doesn't allow for them to work independently. It has been found that poverty and financial hardship are issues for 32% of women escaping family violence. Often a victim of domestic violence is forced to also get their children out of the abusive environment, making it even more difficult to get back on their feet independently. 55% of all women with children who accessed specialist homelessness services said escaping violence was the main reason for getting help. Many Australians believe that the homeless have gotten themselves into their situation, but in the case of domestic violence survivors, people are simply trying to keep themselves and their families safe. Domestic violence is the number 1 cause of homelessness in Victoria and yet people still villainise the homeless and claim that they deserve to be where they are.

One of the main causes of homelessness in big cities like Sydney and Melbourne is a lack of affordable housing and the ever-growing cost of living. A lack of affordable housing has caused thousands of people to become homeless. This problem is only growing in our major cities. The Annual Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey ranks 309 housing markets across 8 countries. As of January 2020 Sydney, is ranked 3rd and Melbourne is 4th and Australia's housing market has been categorised as 'severely unaffordable'. The number of homeless people throughout Melbourne is unknown but there are roughly 400 people sleeping rough in Melbourne's CBD and inner suburbs. In Sydney, as of February 2020 there were 332 people sleeping rough and 505 people in temporary accommodation beds. 'Sleeping rough' refers to people living on the streets without anywhere else to go but that is not the only type of homelessness, often homeless people will live in homeless shelters or stay with friends or family until they get back on their feet. It has been estimated that monthly rent costs between \$1400 and \$2300 (on average) in Melbourne and between \$1800 and \$3300 (on average) in Sydney. It is no wonder that there are so many homeless people in Melbourne and Sydney today when housing prices are so high, and we must understand that this is not easily attainable for everyone. The rising housing prices in Australia somewhat explains why there are so many homeless people and why their situation is so difficult.

Another cause of homelessness is substance addiction, but this too is often misunderstood by our community. It has been estimated that around 26% of homeless people have abused drugs. Addiction is often a cause for homelessness as addictive behaviours can adversely impact a person's life in almost every way. Addictive disorders tend to put a strain on relationships with family and friends and can cause a person to lose their job which could then lead to homelessness. Once someone is homeless, they might not have a support system or money to spare for drug counselling making it very difficult to kick a drug addiction by themselves. Drug abuse is also often a result of homelessness, a homeless person may use drugs to cope or to feel temporarily free from their problems. But of course, drug abuse and addiction will only make it more difficult for someone to get out of their situation, thus continuing the cycle of homelessness. The public's perceptions of the homeless often involve drug addiction, this is the case for some people but isn't for others, so we need to remind ourselves that everyone's story is different. We must keep in mind that there are always other factors at play that have led to that person's situation and we must show humanity and empathy.

The causes and circumstances that lead to someone becoming homeless are far more complex and complicated than most people think. If people were to just educate themselves about the causes and the cycle of homelessness then there wouldn't be such an unfair and inaccurate stigma around it.