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Root Causes of Homelessness in Marin County and Prevention Strategies

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Introduction

Even with increased prevalence of homelessness in the US, there is limited research that investigates circumstances that can lead to homelessness. This lack of understanding perpetuates the inequities in health and wellbeing, access to basic necessities, effective prevention strategies and meaningful policy changes.

More individuals are experiencing homelessness in California than ever before. In Marin, the Ritter Center (RC) strives to prevent and resolve homelessness and improve the health and well-being of individuals living in poverty.

Methods

Researchers approached individuals who were at RC, informed them about the study and asked them to participate.

Analysis consisted of a total of 24, semi-structured interviews conducted in the Spring of 2023. Individuals 18 and older who were seeking support from the Ritter Center were interviewed.

There were five open-ended questions. Sample interview questions included: Can you describe your current living situation? How did you come to this living situation? Can you tell me a story about how you got here? Recorded interviews lasted an average of 17 minutes.

If participants did not consent audio recordings, then hand-written notes were taken (n=8 (33.3%)). Collection efforts were active between April 7th 2023 and April 17th 2023.

Common themes of a greater need for additional resources earlier in life, mental health struggles and past trauma contribute to homelessness, and perpetual safety and health concerns suggest that there are recurrent circumstances that led to experiencing homelessness

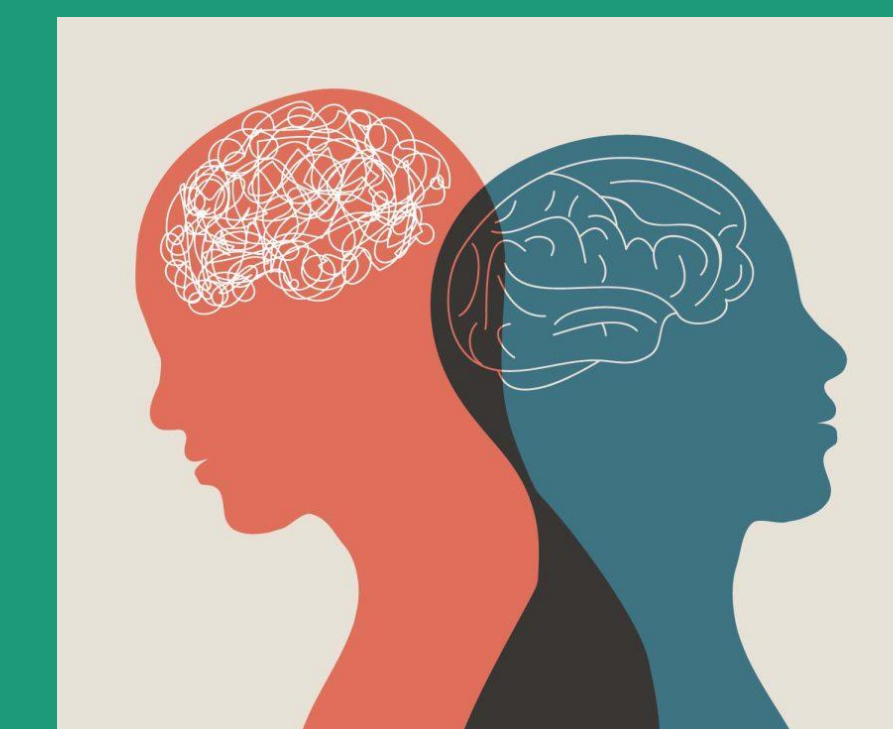


Need for additional resources

Receiving general help, government funding and direct services accessed, help and support from family and friends

Mental health struggles and past trauma

Interpersonal conflicts, grief from past trauma, past substance use and misuse, mental load of homelessness, identity, child/parent trauma, burden



Safety and health concerns

Violence, safety issues, unable to secure sustainable housing, current substance use and misuse, financial burden



Discussion

Findings emphasize the need for more resources, mental health support, and safety measures for the homeless. Policy changes should prioritize affordable housing, mental health funding, and trauma-informed care.

Strengths

First of its kind in Marin County. Obtained extensive, detailed information from 24 participants experiencing homelessness. Despite the limitations of qualitative studies, we believe our findings are applicable to a larger population, thanks to the thorough engagement and trust built with participants before the study.

Limitations

Qualitative research often faces selection bias due to purposeful sampling. Our exploratory approach, though, allowed for broad participant inclusion across various times. However, recruitment solely from clinic areas might have missed individuals facing more significant barriers to care.

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