

Research Alert

Current findings from the National HCH Council

STUDY SHOWS HOMELESSNESS INCREASES VULNERABILITY TO VIOLENCE

“Exploring the Experiences of Violence Among Individuals Who Are Homeless Using a Consumer-Led Approach” was published this February in the peer-reviewed, scientific journal *Violence and Victims*. The purpose of this study was to estimate the prevalence of violence victimization among individuals who were homeless and patients of Health Care for the Homeless grantees and to describe the characteristics related to their perpetrators, injuries incurred and assistance sought.

Main findings

The rate of violence victimization in this national sample of people experiencing homelessness was almost 25 times that found in the general U.S. population (49% vs 2%). Risk of overall victimization was not found to be associated with sex or race. However, those older than 43 and who had been homeless longer than two years were more likely to report being the victim of a violent attack. Compared to males, female victims in this study sample were more likely to be victims of rape, know their perpetrators, and continue to experience suffering after their attacks from psychological trauma, physical disability and/or financial burden.

These results provide evidence that people who are homeless are more vulnerable to victimization. Consider how 15% of the sample reported that they were victims of a hate crime based on their housing status. In addition, 78% of the females who reported being raped noted that the perpetrator was a stranger compared to 21% in general U.S. population. Not only are these individuals more vulnerable to violent attacks, they also face challenges in seeking assistance and treatment. Of those who sought and

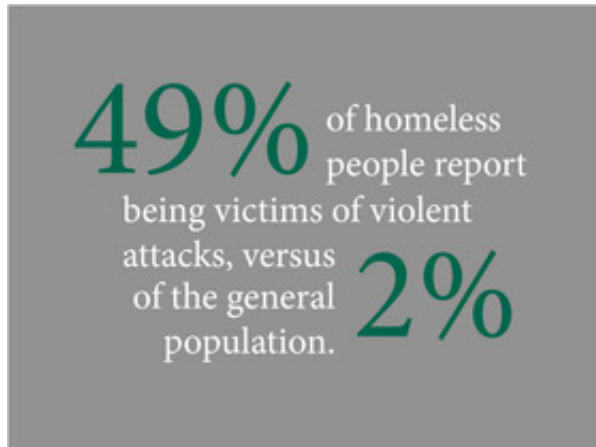


Consumer-led research

This study is unique in that the research was led by individuals who have actually experienced homelessness. Members of the National Consumer Advisory Board of the National Health Care for the Homeless Council developed the survey used in this study, administered the survey on the streets and in homeless health care clinics, helped develop recommendations based on the findings, and have presented the findings at national conferences. This consumer-led approach is an example for other institutions who wish to truly address the needs of the populations they represent and serve.

received help after their attack, 68% were unable to pay their medical bills. Nearly half of the victims (49%) reported they were still suffering consequences after the attack.

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Implications for Practice & Policy

The health practice and policy implications of these findings are numerous. The main recommendations include the following:

- Increase screening and treatment for violence victimization at primary care visits
- Develop a community violence screener so that providers are capturing victims beyond domestic violence situations
- Offer social support based interventions as a preventative measure for those most at risk of victimization
- Conduct outreach to individuals who are chronically homeless using a trauma-informed approach to assess for victimization and refer to treatment
- Train providers to educate and assist patients regarding the Crime Victims' Fund to be compensated for medical costs related to victimization
- Advocate for adding housing status to the list of groups covered by hate crime legislation
- Decriminalize homelessness and train law enforcement to be more sensitive to the needs of those experiencing homelessness.

68% of homeless victims of violence who sought and received help were **unable** to pay the associated medical bills.

For More Information

If you are interested in reading the article or learning more about these important findings, contact [Molly Meinbresse](mailto:mmeinbresse@nhchc.org), Program & Research Specialist, National Health Care for the Homeless Council, (615) 226-2292.

Citation: Meinbresse M, Brinkley-Rubinstein L, Grassetto A, Benson J, Hall C, Hamilton R, Malott M, Jenkins D. (2014). Exploring the Experiences of Violence Among Individuals Who Are Homeless Using a Consumer-Led Approach. *Violence and Victims* 29(1):122-136.



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