

RESEARCH BRIEF

Experiences of Discrimination among Young Adults Experiencing Homelessness: Relationship to Mental Health Outcomes

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Nearly 75% of youth experiencing homelessness also report experiences of discrimination.

Why is this research important?

- Approximately 3.5 million young adults are experiencing homelessness (YAEH) each year. These individuals are at risk for discrimination due to intersecting marginalized identities (homelessness, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity).
- More than 65% of YAEH meet the criteria for a mental disorder which may be exacerbated by experiences of discrimination.

Who was part of this study, and how was the research conducted?

- Data came from a survey of YAEH (age 18-26) conducted across seven cities in the United States - Los Angeles, San Jose, Phoenix, St. Louis, Denver, Houston, and New York City.
- YAEH completed self-administered surveys (N=1,426) to examine the rates and correlates of five discrimination experiences and their association with psychological distress and suicidal ideation.

What did we find?

- Overall, 75.8% of YAEH met criteria for discrimination. 55.8% of YAEH felt devalued and treated with less respect, 50.7% had experiences where they felt people were afraid of them, and 59.8% felt that others thought they were not smart. These experiences were most commonly attributed to their housing status.
- Discrimination experiences were related to symptoms of depression, such as feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness.
- YAEH who were homeless for two years or more experienced higher levels of discrimination, and those who had prior involvement in the criminal legal system and those identified as LGBTQ.

Action steps

- Providers working with YAEH should recognize and validate experiences of discrimination.
- Widespread efforts such as public information campaigns that build compassion could potentially result in fewer experiences of discrimination
- Communities can target policies that perpetuate stigma and contribute to discrimination such as laws that criminalize homelessness.

[Read The Article Here](#)

ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS

This study was conducted by Dr. Sarah C. Narendorf, Associate Professor of Social Work and Associate Dean of Research and Faculty Development at The University of Houston. Dr. Narendorf's research focuses on a successful transition to adulthood for marginalized young people. Contact Information: Dr. Sarah C. Narendorf, sanarendorf@uh.edu, 713-743-8672

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