

# Employment Difficulties Experienced by Employed Homeless People

## What you need to know

Over the last few decades, social policies and social services for people experiencing homelessness have focused on increasing their participation in the work force by addressing the factors that prevent full participation. These factors include drug and alcohol use and abuse, mental health, physical disability and a lack of human capital (the set of skills which an employee acquires on the job, through training and experience, which increase that employee's value in the marketplace). In this sense, employment issues discussed within homelessness research have been limited to addressing the relationship between maintaining employment and individual deficits of people experiencing homelessness.



## ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS

**Michael L. Shier** is a PhD student from the School of Social Policy and Practice, University of Pennsylvania. His research interests include homelessness, social service delivery, and the social environment.

**John R. Graham** is Murray Fraser Professor of Community Economic Development, Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary.

**Marion E. Jones** is Professor, Department of Economics, University of Regina.

## VISIT

[www.homelesshub.ca](http://www.homelesshub.ca)  
for more information

## KEYWORDS

*employment, homelessness, labour market, shelters, day labour, temporary jobs*

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## ARTICLE SOURCE

*Employment Difficulties Experienced by Employed Homeless People: Labor Market Factors That Contribute to and Maintain Homelessness* was published in the *Journal of Poverty*, Volume 16, Issue 1 in 2012.

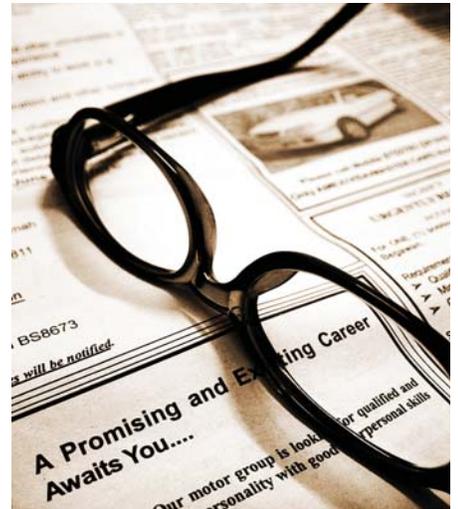
## What did the researchers find?

The researchers found that homeless prevention strategies that rely solely on the labour market as a means of acquiring stable housing and exiting homelessness are narrow and ineffective.

These approaches focus on skills training and development to improve individual deficits, while ignoring the systemic forces that make it hard to find and maintain employment. Related to the characteristics of the labour market, participants identified insufficient work, inconsistent pay, and poor relationships with employers as negatively contributing to their situation of homelessness. Regarding available economic opportunities, the researchers highlight the instability of temporary employment that neither allows for building strong relationships with employers, nor allows for people to plan for the future. They also found that unsatisfactory employment could lead to homelessness when people quit their undesirable jobs and are then unable to afford housing. Considering the relationship between homelessness services and employment, the researchers note that most shelters are set up only to provide temporary shelter and meet basic needs, while ignoring the employment needs of service users.

## What is this research about?

This research investigates the interrelationship between homelessness and participation in the work force from the perspective of employed homeless people in Calgary, Alberta. It highlights aspects of the labour market that contribute to homelessness, and also demonstrates that many homeless people do work in some capacity (in contrast to the popular stereotype that all homeless people are unemployed).



## What did the researchers do?

The researchers interviewed 61 people currently using homelessness services in Calgary who identified themselves as being both employed and homeless. These participants were either employed in part-time, full-time, and casual work, or self-employed. Some of the participants were employed at the time of the study, while others reported being recently unemployed from full-

time or part-time employment. The researchers used the information from the interviews to report on labour market factors that directly affect people's experiences with homelessness. These included characteristics of the labour market, available economic opportunities, problems with homelessness services, and difficulties becoming part of the work force.

## HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

This research can be used to show that many people experiencing homelessness are, in fact, employed. It can also be used to inform shelter policy such that the current strict meal times and sleeping hours become more relaxed in order to assist clients who are employed in after-hours shift work. The need to provide work confirmation forms to shelters in order to receive lunches and/or work-related equipment could also be re-assessed as this practice has been found to interfere with the employment opportunities of homeless people.