

MENTAL HEALTH AND YOUTH HOMELESSNESS:

A CRITICAL REVIEW

Sean KIDD

What do we need to know?

Canadian literature has not fully uncovered the relationship between youth homelessness and mental health, and how they are related to both risks and resources present in pre-street and homeless circumstances. It is clear that homeless youth experience high rates of poor mental health, and that many youth are immersed in an environment characterized by substantial risk. Evidence suggests that many youth are subjected to tremendous adversity, including family conflict and various types of abuse and victimization well before they experience homelessness. These occurrences can have a substantial impact on the mental health of youth, which often worsens with the experience of homelessness. Despite the frequent mental health challenges of homeless youth, the majority are not receiving any form of treatment.



WHAT IS THIS CHAPTER ABOUT?

This chapter provides an overview of the literature on mental health among homeless youth, and highlights gaps in the current knowledge base as well as directions for future inquiry. This chapter is divided into three major sections. First, a description of the course of mental health concerns is provided from pre-street to street contexts. Second, the author describes psychological and interpersonal factors and how they serve to frame mental health and illness in the street context. For instance, research on resiliency and coping is reviewed, as well as how a youth's worldview, value system or culture can set the parameters and nature of their coping. How these parameters are set can have a large impact on the amount of distress a youth experiences. Finally, recommendations are made for policy, service provision, and further inquiry.

ARTICLE SOURCE

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How can you use this chapter?

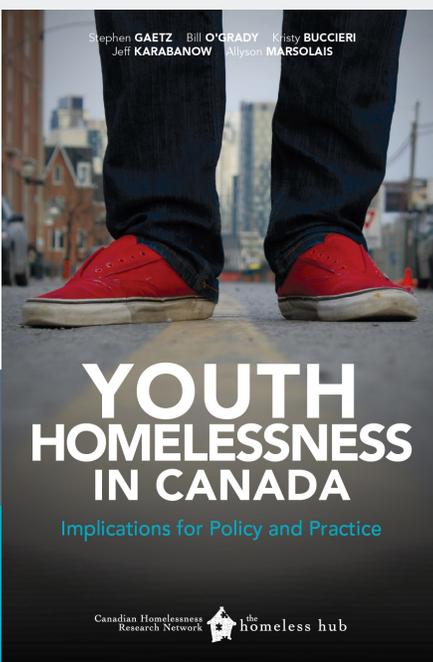
The author identifies four key directions that are necessary in order to address the high rates of mental illness and associated death among homeless youth. First, there is a need to expand efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions. This must be done in conjunction with meeting the basic needs of each youth. Second, this chapter points to the need for a more collaborative system of care that better meet the needs of homeless youth with mental health concerns. For instance, community-based programs must coordinate their

services with psychiatric care providers. Third, there is a need for the development of trauma-informed care, or services that acknowledge and understand the relevance of trauma and provide access to interventions that address those issues. Finally, there must be an understanding of how youth homelessness and mental illness are influenced by broader systemic problems such as failed child protection efforts, inadequate screening and prevention frameworks in schools, and criminal justice involvement.



“...there must be an understanding of how youth homelessness and mental illness are influenced by broader systemic problems...”

About the researcher



SEAN KIDD is the Head of the Psychology Service in the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's Schizophrenia Division and he is also an Assistant Professor with the University of Toronto Department of Psychiatry. Dr. Kidd's research interests include examining mechanisms of resilience among marginalized persons and the effectiveness of psychiatric rehabilitation interventions. His past work has focused on Assertive Community Treatment, policy and service development for homeless youths, and the delivery of recovery-oriented services.

This free e-book is available at:

www.homelesshub.ca/youthhomelessness