Homelessness in older adults: an emerging crisis

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“I’m old and I’m tired and I got my disability...I can’t, I can’t do it no more...”

-55 year old homeless woman in HOPE HOME Study
The homeless population is aging

• In 1990, 11% of people experiencing homelessness in SF were 50 or older

• In 2003, 37% were

• Now about half are…

Hahn J et al. The Aging of the Homeless Population
JGIM 2006
Why 50?

- People living in poverty have premature aging
- Many will not live to traditional “old age”
Generational effect

- Americans born in the second half of the baby boom (1954-1963) have had elevated risk
  - 30-40% of homeless individuals* born 1954-1963
  - About half are 50 and over

*doesn’t include people living in homeless families or unaccompanied youth


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Housing assistance stagnant as compared to other federal outlays for low income individuals

California has 21 units available for every 100 extremely low income households.

Source: NLIHC Tabulations of 2014 ACS PUMS data
Will the trend continue?

- Among renters age 50 and over, 30% spend more than half their income in rent “severe housing burden”
- Median age of homeless individuals expected to rise

Racial discrimination and housing

- Housing primary means of wealth-building
- Discriminatory housing policies
  - Segregated neighborhoods
  - Redlining—restricted access to mortgages in segregated neighborhoods
  - Predatory lending
- Discrimination in rental market
- Criminal justice, employment and educational discrimination
- **African Americans at 3-4 fold increased risk of homelessness**
Data from HOPE HOME Study
Two thirds are 60 and under, but 12% are older than 65 years at study entry: Median age 57
Study population

- 77% men
- 80% African American
- 13% currently work for pay
- 28% currently looking for work
- 90% income less than $1150/month
Almost a third lost stable housing* in the past year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years since last stable housing</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;6 months</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 mo to &lt;1 yr</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 yr to &lt;5 yrs</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 yrs to &lt;10 yrs</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10+ years</td>
<td>15</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Defined as non-institutional place that you lived for a year or more

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Economic challenges and interpersonal conflict common reasons for housing loss

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>% of Sample</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Couldn't pay rent/mortgage</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent increased</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost job</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Became sick/disabled</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other bills (not medical)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone else stopped paying rent/mortgage</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family abuse/violence</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kicked out (not related to money)</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t get along/asked to leave</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking/doing drugs</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evicted</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housemates’ substance use/stealing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building condemned/destroyed/foreclosed</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reasons</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moved to new city/more desirable place</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital/treatment program</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incarcerated</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions were poor</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
44% with first episode of homelessness after age 50
Early onset homelessness

- Multiple adverse life experiences
  - Low income attainment in early adulthood
  - No spouse partner
  - Mental health problems
  - Traumatic brain injury
  - Imprisonment
  - Alcohol use problem

Brown RT, Goodman L, Guzman D, Tieu L, Ponath C, Kushel MB. Pathways to Homelessness among Older Homeless Adults: Results from the HOPE HOME Study. PLoS One. 2016 May 10;11(5)
I only did like 5-6 months in YA [juvenile justice] when I was 13, but then after that I started getting violations over the years, that’s where the four years [in juvenile justice system] came in at, going back and forth.... Yeah, when I got to be 17 then they took me off.... When I got 21, that’s when I started using drugs...At that time I was doing burglaries and all kind of petty thefts and …I don’t know, back then it was like every ninety days I end up back in San Quentin. It wasn’t like, “Oh, I can’t wait until I go get high,” or nothing like that, but eventually I got high. Then that one time led to one another and a thousand other too many. So I was in that mentality, trapped in that mentality for over forty years.
(My father said): “Next time you, if you runaway, I’ll beat you with a car chain or I’m going to throw you out the window.” Okay, so I, I was, I wouldn’t use the word ‘reasonable’ but I put things in perspective real quick and I would say, “Could I survive a car chain? Probably not.” Then I looked out the window and said, and we lived on the 13th floor, I said, “I ain’t playing with this man.” He went to work, I had whatever I had on me, I was out the door.
Late onset homelessness

- Work histories: low wage, unskilled labor

- Crisis
  - Job loss
  - Marital breakdown
  - Illness (participant, spouse)
  - Death (spouse, parent)
‘It was a lot of different things but basically the new owners took over, we were being evicted. My wife, she had just got out of the hospital, had the stroke and was blind. . . . so, the daughter came up and said, ‘Don’t fight it, y’all can come stay with me for a couple months and save your money.’ So we said, ‘Okay’ ... [and didn’t fight the eviction]. After we moved out of the place, turned in the keys and everything we went over to her house and she said, ‘Y’all can’t stay here.’ And I said, ‘I got $9 in my pocket,’ I said, ‘At least let your mother spend the night because we don’t have enough money to get a motel room.’ She said, ‘No.’ So that was the beginning.”
…When they bought the company out they cut our hours back and they would bring in temp workers and they would give them all the hours and they weren’t giving us our hours, which caused me to lose my place I was staying in because I couldn’t afford to pay the rent, because, you know, from, you’re going from almost 80-100 (hours) a week down to 20 hours a week, it’s kind of hard to pay bills.
Social Support

Partnership:
- 5% currently married/partnered
- 41% never married
- 11% widowed; 43% divorced or separated

Other Sources:
- 67% say that they have “someone to confide in”
- 54% report attending house of worship or social club
Yeah, because, all my friends, I’m going to say like 80% of them or 90% of them, they were all working people like me… I was just too ashamed… These were the people who cared….but I, I didn’t look at it that way. I should have.
While late onset homeless individuals tend to have fewer vulnerabilities, many had significant health challenges related to their homelessness.
Poor health in every measure

56% report health as fair or poor
Self-reported chronic diseases are common: but may be underreported
High Proportion with functional impairments


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High prevalence of cognitive impairment 3MS measures global impairments; Trails B measures executive function

Hurstak et al Drug and Alcohol 2017
50 is the new 75

Median age 57, but overall health worse than those in 70s and 80s
Alcohol and Drug use problems common

- 65% with moderate or greater severity of drug use symptoms
- 26% moderate or greater severity alcohol use symptoms

Prevalence of illicit drug and alcohol use problems

- lower than younger homeless adults
- higher than same age
- dramatically higher than those in 70s and 80s
Mental Health Problems are common

- Depression
- PTSD
- Psychiatric hospitalization ever
- Psychiatric hospitalization last 6 months
Suffering comes in many forms
High prevalence of symptoms

Symptom Prevalence

- Physical
- Psychological
- Social
- Existential

Percent of Sample

Patanwala et al under review
Symptoms related to homelessness

“When I start thinking that I’m not gonna get off of this situation, my body starts to hurt, my stomach gets nauseated. It’s burning like it’s on fire.”

“My back pain actually is pretty real because I’m sleeping on cement but the thing that really gets me is the future. Sometimes there is a hopeless feeling that comes on.”

“Psychologically…I’m getting more used to the idea that my life is a complete waste. Nothing gets done. I don’t have family. I don’t have a career. I’m not a productive human being. It’s day after day of wasting my time.”
Loneliness and regret cause suffering

“…One of the things that gets me is when I say hello to somebody, and they don’t say hello back. That hurts. That’s one of the mix-ups of this culture that I am, that level of being untouchable…and that hurts. I mean psychologically is devastating…”
Food insecurity is common

Over half experience food insecurity:

• 31% low food security
• 24% very low food security
Housing Status at 24 months n=286

- Homeless n=110 (38%)
- Housed n=157 (55%)
- Institution n=19 (7%)

Not included:
- Deceased  n=17
- Dropped out or unable to ascertain  n=47
Where were individuals housed at 24 months? n=286

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing Status</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permanent Supportive Housing</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional Housing</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subsidized Housing</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housed alone</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housed with friends or family</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotel with tenancy rights</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
High mortality rate

of 350, 29 have died thus far
To care for aging population...

Problems

Low wage workers lack pensions/retirement funds
Severe lack of deeply affordable housing
Functional and cognitive impairment, and multi-morbidity
Disproportionately affects populations with less political power
Some solutions

- Support for low wage workers with early exit from workforce
- Increase supply of deeply affordable housing
  - 0-30% AMI at highest risk of homelessness
- Housing First Permanent Supportive Housing
  - Adapted for needs aging population
- Bolster families’ ability to care for older adults
  - Recognize their strengths while assessing safety
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