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## [The Dynamics of Homelessness: Research and Policy](#)

Edited by Barrett A. Lee, Marybeth Shinn, and Dennis P. Culhane

*The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (693; January 2021)

The long-simmering problem of homelessness in the United States has expanded dramatically in recent years. People who experience homelessness are often stigmatized and thought of as part of a static American underclass. Social science has even contributed to this view: in the twentieth century, point-in-time “snapshot” analyses tended to characterize homeless persons as part of a population consigned to long stretches of life in shelters or on the streets.

But stronger evidence provides a nuanced view. This volume of *The ANNALS* capitalizes on innovative research designs and multiple types of data that have been collected over time to 1) analyze changes in homeless populations and the people experiencing homelessness; 2) examine factors leading to episodes of homelessness; and 3) evaluate the effectiveness of interventions to end homelessness and to help individuals and families thrive. The articles in the volume illuminate the dynamic nature of homelessness, both at the micro level (where individuals enter, pass through, and exit homelessness on different trajectories) and at the macro level (where shifting conditions and policies influence the scale of the problem and whom it effects).

We have organized the empirical papers in four thematic sections:

### *Structural forces that shape homelessness*

- A longitudinal analysis of HUD and Census Bureau data documents the link between growing income inequality and higher rates of homelessness.
- Another study shows that greater access to cash aid from the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program reduces the extent of family homelessness, especially in majority-Black and Native American school districts.
- Examination of more than 660,000 eviction records from 17 mid-sized cities highlights durable geographic concentrations of evictions in particular neighborhoods and buildings.
- An investigation of eight Continuum of Care communities uses quantitative and qualitative data to explore reasons for the overrepresentation of Blacks and Native Americans among people who experience homelessness.

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202 South 36<sup>th</sup> Street

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### *Trajectories of homelessness among individuals and families*

- A four-year, multi-city Canadian study finds that resources and access to public housing—not individual risk factors—distinguish individuals and families whose housing stability improves.
- According to a longitudinal study in Cleveland, increased participation in public assistance programs after initial shelter entry reduces subsequent shelter utilization.
- Pennsylvania data on patterns of homelessness among formerly incarcerated men show that vulnerability to homelessness can extend well beyond the immediate period following release from prison.
- Information about students in the L.A. Unified School District who experience homelessness describes their movement among different neighborhood and educational contexts.

### *Effects of policies aimed at homeless prevention or shortening the length of episodes*

- A Canadian study reports a strong association between a “housing first” intervention and rapid and sustained stable housing outcomes among homeless adults with a history of mental illness.
- Randomized trial data from HUD’s Family Options Study reveal few differences between Black and white recipients’ success in using housing vouchers to reduce returns to homelessness.
- Research in Washington State finds that permanent supportive housing offers chronically homeless families more access to services and benefits but does little to improve their housing stability, employment, or criminal justice system involvement.
- Longitudinal data for more than 6 million VA outpatients show that universal screening for housing stability among veterans has been effective at linking them to resources but does not guarantee access to safe, affordable, and permanent housing solutions.

### *Critical perspectives and innovative methodological approaches*

- Qualitative research concludes that the limited capacity of Continuum of Care communities constrains their effectiveness, inhibits innovation, and creates inequities.
- A long-term ethnographic investigation in San Francisco shows a relationship between the opening of new shelters and the criminalization of homelessness in the neighborhoods where the shelters are located.
- An analysis of Google Street View data tracks the growth and spread of tent encampments in Oakland, California, documenting rapid increases in the number and size of encampments after 2014 and new transitional housing efforts by local government.

- A cross-national comparative study of skid row residents in five cities identifies factors that contribute to and undermine homeless persons' sense of security.

Our volume concludes with reflections on how the research presented here can inform policy-makers about addressing the root causes of homelessness, preventing its occurrence, providing services, and promoting permanent exits from homelessness. We also discuss findings relevant to racial disparities in homelessness service system access and efficacy.

Taken together, the volume's contents do more than contribute to the base of social scientific knowledge. They suggest that new understandings and evidence-led programs and interventions may go a long way toward eradicating the homelessness problem currently plaguing our nation.

