5-1-2023

Mental Health & Homelessness

Lucy Alimamy

Follow this and additional works at: https://vc.bridgew.edu/honors_proj

Part of the Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons

Recommended Citation
Copyright © 2023 Lucy Alimamy

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.
Mental Health & Homelessness

Lucy Fatu Alimamy

Submitted in Partial Completion of the
Requirements for Departmental Honors in Criminal Justice

Bridgewater State University

May 1, 2023

Dr. Francisco Alatorre, Thesis Advisor        Date: 4/30/23
Dr. Jamie Huff, Committee Member            Date: 5/1/23
Dr. Robert Grantham, Committee Member       Date: 5/1/23
Abstract

No specific gender, race, socioeconomic status, or occupation is exempt from the stigma associated with mental health issues. It has an impact on every person, both directly and indirectly. Women who have been victimized often suffer from mental illnesses that lead to additional victimization, such as homelessness. The main goal of this thesis is to inform and raise awareness of homelessness and mental illness. I hope that by sharing the information and data I will be collecting through my work, people will be inspired to help those in need in our neighborhoods and, in the long run, will contribute to the eradication of the stigmas and misinformation associated with these two subjects. Using a communications platform called Zoom, we were able to perform interviews with the help of tailored and concentrated questions. Through these mean homeless women were able to communicate with us from their shelter, Ozanam Manor, a faith-based organization. The interviews were organic, contextually rich, insightful, and effective in the sense that that prompted to consider their responses from several angles. In general, the interviews helped to advance knowledge of homelessness and its effects on mental health.
Introduction

This thesis explores the connections between childhood victimization, adult victimization, and homelessness. Using interviews and data from the 2022 ATP research project, conducted at Ozanam Manor a mixed-shelter etc., resulting in *Perception of Social and Physical Environmental Risk Factors Affecting Women Experiencing Homelessness: A Mixed Method Study*, I will try to dispel or alleviation connections between mental health and the homeless, particularly homeless women.

Both homelessness and mental health issues are stigmatized by a variety of misconceptions and presumptions that not only reflect poorly on those affected but have caused homelessness and mental health to be held as mutually exclusive. Homelessness and mental health are not mutually exclusive; research indicates that many homeless individuals also have one or more mental health disorders, and vice versa, according to E. Struening and D. Padgett's work, "Physical Health Status, Substance Use and Abuse, and Mental Disorders Among Homeless Adults" (1990).

A person's mental health can be harmed by a variety of factors, including sexual assault, battery, domestic violence, drug abuse, physical disabilities, and unstable housing. The extent of harm brought on by such violent victimization cannot be measured or categorized because everyone experiences trauma differently and manifests its impact in different ways. These factors have been discovered to prevent women from leading relatively normal lives, which may lead to homelessness (Calvo et al., 2022). Homelessness increases exposure to trauma and victimization. This can be especially dangerous for homeless women, as they are more likely to be targeted for their vulnerability and ultimately experience greater harm to their mental health (Calvo et al., 2022; Dokkedahl et al., 2022; Struening & Padgett, 1990). There are not enough resources and
supports available to help these people safely leave their violent environments and conditions, which makes them more likely to become victims, incur further harm, and experience worsening effects on their mental health (Browne, 1993; Tutty et al., 2013).

The trauma homeless women experience makes them vulnerable to social stereotypes and harsh judgments, which makes it difficult for them to connect with society and get the help they need. This is well exemplified by the following case study involves female participants who spoke about being abused and dealing with the trauma brought on by experiences.

Courtney (a fictitious name), a female resident of the Ozanam Manor shelter, disclosed that the years of abuse she endured have left her with anxiety and PTSD. She insisted that talking to the shelter staff and doing breathing exercises had helped her learn how to deal with her stressors and mental illnesses without resorting to medication, but she still gets very scared if someone surprises her, comes up from behind her, or touches her without asking.

Courtney endured abuse at the hands of the men in her life from childhood into adulthood. "When I was from 4 to 11, my uncle molested me at my grandmother's house... Then when I was from 18 to about 21, I met my daughter's father, and he used to just hit me all the time for anything. He was real jealous and just crazy. That was a big trauma in my life", Courtney grudgingly admitted in her interview.

Courtney has experienced a lot of abuse in her life, and this has led to her current state of homelessness. The trauma she continues to experience today is likely due to the abuse she endured in the past. To protect herself from further victimization, Courtney now parks a wheelchair in front of her bed. Her traumas have destroyed her trust in people and any sense of vulnerability she may have once enjoyed. Courtney's case provides strong evidence that there is a connection between mental illness and homelessness, rather than a mutual exclusion. People who
are homeless because of trauma often have a difficult time finding housing, and not addressing mental illness in these individuals will probably keep them in a never-ending cycle of homelessness.

The account provided above is lived by numerous women all around us. At any stage of life, violent encounters increase the risk of homelessness (Browne, 1993). Using the 2022 ATP research, we studied the issue of homelessness among women living in Ozanam Manor, a transitional blended homeless shelter in Arizona. Among the women at Ozanam Manor that were interviewee, it was learned that victimhood and lifestyle choices played a significant role in their predicament. Through the interviews, we were able to identify issues like molestation, joblessness, drug and alcohol abuse, physical disabilities, troubled family complexities, and tense social interactions that presented constraints to the accomplishments, development, rehabilitation, and healing process of women who were experiencing homelessness. These problems made it difficult or impossible for people to move from being homeless to reliable, protected, and generally healthier settings.

Homelessness and mental health are two issues that frequently incite hostility and contention in our society. It is my hope that this work will contribute to a greater understanding of both issues and lessen the marginalization of groups who are affected by one or both. Change, awareness, and healing can occur when we work together.

**Literature Review**

This study, along with the other literature reviews outlined, focuses on the ways in which women's psychiatric disorders can make them vulnerable to homelessness or unstable housing. Interpersonal and ecological factors that can lead to victimization, self-victimization, or
revictimization of women often include substance abuse, physical health problems, mental health disorders, and violence against women (Alatorre, 2019, Milaney et al, 2020). These incidents may increase dread and unwillingness to live with men in a gender-mixed shelter such as Ozanam Manor.

There is a strong connection between interpersonal and ecological factors that lead to women becoming homeless and increasing vulnerability to different types of victimization, which can have a profound impact on their mental health (Shoemaker et al, 2020). The women are very reluctant to share a shelter with men or other women who have experienced trauma like their own, because they are afraid that they will be victimized again (Aguilar-Delgado and Nunes, 2021).

Many homeless women struggle to overcome the trauma of their experiences, and many of them relapse into old patterns of behavior that led to their homelessness. This often leads to tension with others who are trying to help them, including workers at shelters and programs that provide assistance (Browne, 1993; Tutty et al., 2013). Women who are homeless often struggle to maintain stable employment, form wholesome connections, and interact efficiently due to mental illnesses like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiousness, and depressed mood that result from trauma, abuse, and other high-risk occurrences (Browne, 1993; Dokkedahl et al., 2022). Their chances of becoming homeless rise as a result, and they are further underrepresented and subjected to more hostility.

Women experiencing homelessness (WEH) are most likely to experience a variety of types of abuse, including physical, verbal, and emotional, just like Courtney did. If they have a disability, either physical or psychological, their chances of becoming homeless which starts a vicious circle and pattern of victimization, despair, and exclusion that is destructive to their
Mental health (Calvo et al., 2022; Dokkedahl et al., 2022; Struening & Padgett, 1990). This helps explain why some women would rather stay in unhealthy situations and relationships than enter shelters where they would be required to live with strangers, both male and female (Aguilar-Delgado and Nunes, 2021).

Some women who are in abusive situations choose to stay because they don't have the money, manpower, or stable environment to escape. Even worse conditions exist for mothers of young children. It is preferable to endure abuse than to suffer or lose their children. Sadly, as has been repeatedly stated, this only causes more harm to their mental health (Tutty et al., 2013; Browne, 1993).

It can be challenging for women who have experienced violence and are dealing with trauma to form close relationships with their shelter roommates. The difficulty increases when men are included in the equation. Because of this, gender-mixed shelters—while welcoming and considerate—are not the best option for women who have experienced victimization since they leave them feeling exposed, constantly on guard, and with walls put up to protect themselves from further victimization. "Women were more likely to say the violent behaviors of others (especially intimate partners) contributed to their homelessness" (Tutty et al., 2013). This may lead them to be more cautious about interacting with others, especially in shelters that are gender inclusive, like Ozanam Manor.

**Methodology**

**Qualitative Design**

Qualitative methodology was used in gathering data with the aim of obtaining valuable information from the perspective of the participant (Alatorre, 2016). Qualitative methodology is best suited in dealing with human beings facing difficult circumstances (Sandstrom, et al., 2003).
This methodological approach takes advantage of the in-depth, contextual nature of qualitative findings (Hanson et al., 2005). The sampling was purposive because our intention was to select participants who would allow us to maximize our understanding of the phenomenon (Alatorre, 2016). Furthermore, the goal for this study aligns with Onwuegbuzie and Leech's (2007) objective "to obtain insights into a particular social process and practices that prevail within specific location". The researchers conducted five in-depth interviews, because the project aims to understand the underlying motivations, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings of the participants (Sandstrom, et al., 2003).

**Criteria for recruitment and selection of participants**

From the list of clients who were willing to participate in the study, I selected 3 participants for this thesis project, based on the following criteria of selection:

- Identify as women.
- Diverse race and ethnic representation (African American, Hispanic, White, Native American)
- Adults
- Previous exposure to trauma-related events
- Different ages, within the range of 19 - 85
- All participants must be able to speak and read English.
- All participants must be mentally capable.

**Data Collection**

Through a series of interviews, the ATP team conducted with the women in the summer of 2022, I was able to identify a variety of commonalities that they had expressed. I was able to identify various common problems that have left the women vulnerable in terms of their physical
Mental Health of Women and Homelessness

health, financial security, emotional stability, mental health, and of course, housing destabilization. These problems have severely impacted these women, as seen in their body language, facial gestures, and eventually, their unwillingness to continue talking about certain subjects. I felt confident in my ability to conclude from the interviews that these problems weren't caused by just one difficulty, but rather were the result of a combination of difficulties that contributed to the people's weakening and alarming mental illnesses and eventual homelessness.

I then entered the observed themes into three different diagram tables for the three persons whose experiences I found to be the most moving and most like my own experience. The tables effectively convey the connections between the difficulties. Violence, Financial Complications, Health Issues, Housing Instability, and Conflict with Others are among the themes.

One thing all the women had in common was Violence. Every one of them had been a victim of some form of violence, including verbal, physical, or emotional abuse. Physical violence seems inevitably joined by verbal and emotional abuse. For these reasons, I chose those three phrases. Emotional or other forms of violence frequently coexist with physical violence. 

Financial Complications were something else the women had to deal with. With such a topic, instability and unemployment were conveyed. The women had difficulty obtaining employment, retaining it, or sustaining a steady source of income.

The women suffered from Health Issues, which contributed to their homelessness. Following their diagnoses, the ladies described feeling abandoned—either by their partners or other family members—and dealing with pain and immobility.
Mental Health of Women and Homelessness

One of the chosen themes was *Housing Instability* because the main reason why the women experience homelessness is because of housing instability brought on by the rejection and betrayal of those they hold dear. Undoubtedly, these two variables that cause insecure housing will influence a person's already weakened mental health and increase their sense of social isolation.

The last subject I want to emphasize is *Conflict with Others*. The women had confrontations with individuals both before and after being placed in the shelters, which they acknowledge contributed to their homelessness. I believe the words Conflict with Others is more appropriate for the theme because their inability to progress is primarily a result of a lack of trust in others and continual disputes with others.

Ultimately, it's challenging, if not impossible, to measure and classify the extent of the harm that traumatic events may cause to a person's mental health and personal life, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't try to comprehend it. By making an effort to understand, we could start working on developing potential answers, boosting resources, and launching discussions that will aid the hurting communities and society at large.

**Ashley**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Meaning Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td></td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td></td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Francisco A:* So, question number one is social factors such as addiction, family tragedy, job loss, domestic violence, mental illness, and more play a heavy part in the cause of homelessness. So, with that in mind, what social factors caused you to become homeless?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mental Health of Women and Homelessness 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ashley:</strong> Oh, okay. First thing, I became divorced, and when I became divorced... The reason I divorced... because I'm sick. I have cancer. So, when my ex, he knew I have cancer, so he divorced me, and he said, &quot;The last thing I'm going to do for you, I'm going to take you to the hospital, and that's it.&quot; I become homeless from the hospital, and now I'm, like, I have two years now that I'm homeless.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial Complications</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Francisco A:</strong> Okay. What about income wise or some kind of barriers that you had in your life?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ashley:</strong> I didn't have income before. Now, I have SSI because I have cancer, you know?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Francisco A:</strong> How could you learn better ways to deal with conflict? Like, let's say that you get into a situation with a resident or some of the staff are not getting what you want, and it gets to be a conflict. How do you learn how to deal with that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ashley:</strong> Oh, of course. Not everything I need, and, thank God, I got SSI. If I need something, I go to buy it from store. For me, personally, I got SSI, and if the people, they need something, they ask for it, and if they don't, if they say, &quot;No,&quot; it's no because of the rules. Everything, it has to be our rules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Francisco A:</strong> Okay, and when you say, &quot;SSI,&quot; you mean Social Security aid? Is that what you mean?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ashley:</strong> Yes, yes. Social Security.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abandonment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Francisco A:</strong> So, question number one is social factors such as addiction, family tragedy, job loss, domestic violence, mental illness, and more play a heavy part in the cause of homelessness. So, with that in mind, what social factors caused you to become homeless?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ashley:</strong> Oh, okay. First thing, I became divorced, and when I became divorced... The reason I divorced... because I'm sick. I have cancer. So, when my ex, he knew I have cancer, so he divorced me, and he said, &quot;The last thing I'm going to do for you, I'm going to take you to the hospital, and that's it.&quot; I become...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Immobility | Francisco A: So, question number one is social factors such as addiction, family tragedy, job loss, domestic violence, mental illness, and more play a heavy part in the cause of homelessness. So, with that in mind, what social factors caused you to become homeless?  
Ashley: Yes, and after like two years from treatment to chemotherapy to surgeries, I have double mastectomy. I had to have hysterectomy, and I have hernia surgeries. So, all these surgeries last year, and, after that, I do the radiation.  
Francisco A: Mm-hmm.  
Ashley: Yes, and now I'm taking p.o. chemo pills to stop the cancer to coming back.  
Francisco A: So, all of that has limited you and your mobility, right-  
Ashley: Yeah. |
| Pain       | Francisco A: ... because you're taking all these medications, and are you trying to look for a job at this moment, or are you just at Ozanam Manor at this moment?  
Ashley: Actually, no, because, with this cancer, I have my back. Because I had my back injured when I had my baby, you know-  
Francisco A: Mm-hmm.  
Ashley: ... when I had my son, and my back is killing me. So, I can't even... If I do like a simple chore, like, now, if I clean my room, I can't. Like, I have to rest like for a half an hour. Then, if I want to do anything else, I'm going to have to do it later because I can't do things. Like, I can't look for a job. |
| Rejection  | Francisco A: ... but, mostly, the reason you're there is because of the abandonment of your husband- |
Housing Instability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Betrayal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| *Francisco A:* All right, cool. So, it was just the abandonment that provoked for you to come into the streets and got into becoming homeless.

*Ashley:* Yeah.

Conflict with Others

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| *Francisco A:* So, talking to staff or talking to other people, like, other residents, do you feel that you don't want to talk to them or you want to?

*Ashley:* No, no. Here, the residents here, the staff, you feel like you want to talk to them all the time because they make you feel you are important, and they make you feel like you are worthy to talk to. You know what I mean?

*Francisco A:* Mm-hmm.

*Ashley:* So, they don't look at you as a homeless person. They look at you as a friend, or, more importantly, their friend, really.

Disputes Not Applicable

*Participants have fictional names due to confidentiality*

**Bella**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Meaning Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|          | Physical | *Interviewer Ana M:* While staying at Ozanam Manor, have you felt more comfortable and safer than you generally have in the past few years?

*Bella:* ...because of my eye and because of the domestic violence, the guns being put to my head, my kids being shot, but I’m just grabbing my feelings right now.
Interviewer Ana M: So, moving on to the next question. Question number two, physical factors such as limited access to healthcare, problems getting enough food, lack of physical mobility, trouble staying safe, violence, stress, unsanitary living conditions, exposure to severe weather conditions, deteriorating physical and mental conditions are factors that play a heavy role in the cause of homelessness. What physical factors caused you to become homeless?

Bella: It was actually because of physical. It started because of the abuse. A year ago, I went back to Tucson after I was here in Phoenix, and my ex-husband, he was actually previously doing home invasions. So, when I moved in with my sister who moved from a different city to meet me halfway, because my grandparents were gone, so we could try to work it out. He started doing home invasions at the place that me and her resided at. So, she ended up wanting to go back to the place which was Morenci, Arizona, and when she left back, I was working and she left me, my car broke, and the company that I was working for was going under bankruptcy. So, I became homeless because of covid.

Emotional

Interviewer Ana M: So, question number three. While staying at Ozanam Manor, have you felt more comfortable and safer than you generally have in the past few years?

Bella: Oh, yes. I definitely have. The people here, because I can see a couple of them, they came to the same place from where I was came from, because of my eye and because of the domestic violence, the guns being put to my head, my kids being shot, but I'm just grabbing my feelings right now because even because I'm going into the past, because it's a previous and it has to do with my emotions. So, I'm trying to make it a mindset so I can be in a comfortable place. So, it doesn't bothering me or affect me or make me cry because I'm very well blessed to have me and my kids alive. If that makes sense.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial Complications</th>
<th>Instability</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|                          |                 | **Interviewer Ana M:** Sounds good. For question number 10. Do you have any plan to get out of your current situation?  

**Bella:** As you know, I have a problem with my feet and my back. I study law too and I previously was working for a law firm. Right now, I'm studying bankruptcies and stuff. I'm trying to figure out how I can present it to the court. I have an arbitration. So, my arbitration, the company have not paid me since 2018. So, the injury comes back, I get steroid shots in my feet, and then my back I have to wear a brace. So, with that said, with that money, I want to get me a car. I need a car, it's kind of hard. Shouldn't take the lift sometimes, because sometimes they won't... Being homeless is put this way. A lot of people, they treat you kind of rude. They don't understand, they're not humble. Like people that are in missionary or that going through the same thing or that that's safe to say. Does that make sense?  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health Issues</th>
<th>Abandonment</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|              |             | **Interviewer Ana M:** Social factors such as addiction, family tragedy, job loss, domestic violence, mental illness, and more, play a heavy part in the cause of homelessness. So, with that in mind, what social factors caused you to become homeless?  

**Bella:** ...my uncle got mad at me because of the ambulance, because he didn't want me to call the ambulance. I was trying to help my grandfather, and they made the decision to have the rosary when the pallbearers for Catholic church, when my grandfather was buried, and then when they did that, they kicked me out. So, I went to the streets.  

**Interviewer Ana M:** Because Ozanam Manor is a mixed-gender shelter and has shared spaces, do you have any concerns or hesitations about your safety?  

**Bella:** So, when I was younger, I used to like, "I don't even do this." And being abused and somebody accuses you and you not blaming them, but they're blaming you,
if you've never been in that situation, you don't know how to get out of it, and it's a vicious cycle.

**Immobility**

*Interviewer Paulina A:* Actually, Anna, if I may interrupt, I just want to follow up with a quick question. From what I understand that you're explaining to us, and thank you so much for sharing your story, do you have any illnesses or disability, physical disabilities, that would present more obstacles to the current situation being homeless and then being in a shelter?

*Bella:* I'm actually working on that. I'm trying to get disability. The physical doctor, which is an internist, I have scheduled an appointment. My doctor's... I have a walker right now, so I have a fibroma on my feet, and sometimes I fall. I have the eyesight problem, but that doesn't seem to bother me as much, I'm just light sensitive, and then I have a real bad back problem in the carpal tunnel. I've had oral cancer, but that cancer has been removed from my mouth, my tongue.

**Pain**

*Not Applicable*

**Housing Instability**

**Rejection**

*Interviewer Ana M:* Social factors such as addiction, family tragedy, job loss, domestic violence, mental illness, and more, play a heavy part in the cause of homelessness. So, with that in mind, what social factors caused you to become homeless?

*Bella:* ...my uncle got mad at me because of the ambulance, because he didn't want me to call the ambulance. I was trying to help my grandfather, and they made the decision to have the rosary when the pallbearers for Catholic church, when my grandfather was buried, and then when they did that, they kicked me out. So, I went to the streets.

**Betrayal**

*Interviewer Ana M:* Because Ozanam Manor is a mixed-gender shelter and has shared spaces, do you have any concerns or hesitations about your safety?

*Bella:* So, when I was younger, I used to like, "I don't even do this." And being abused and somebody accuses you and you not blaming them, but they're blaming you,
if you've never been in that situation, you don't know how to get out of it, and it's a vicious cycle.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict with Others</th>
<th>Trust</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interviewer Ana M:** Do you feel that you can be honest and constructive at Ozanam Manor? Or do you feel that you have to really hide what you think and feel? Both between the residents and the staff.

**Bella:** I'm actually learning a little bit more to feel comfortable, and it's not the staff's actually fault or anything like that, it's because of what I've been through. I'm opening up more and I'm feeling a little bit comfortable. Maybe it's even sharing with you as well. Engaging is a wonderful thing, so you can get some things out. So, the Lord might be using me for something at this point and he might be using you.

**Disputes**

Not Applicable

*Participants have fictional names due to confidentiality*

---

**Destiny**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Meaning Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Violence | Verbal | **Interviewer Paulina A:** Okay. Did you always have trouble with your son's girlfriend?  
**Destiny:** No, not really. They met when they were 17, they had a child. And then just recently, a couple years ago they started getting back together. And then I was over in California living with my daughter and he came over here and visited and then he decided to stay. And then he says, "mom, how about I come over there? You follow me back over here". And I said, "I don't know", Casey got on the phone. And she was just so happy and bubbly. And I thought, Hey, she seems to have a pretty good personality, but that was a person that got in my face. And I walked, I'm not going to take abuse ever again. I mean, she was just an, it was verbal. But once you've been into a situation of being, may it be called...
domestic violence or a stranger, I don't accept it. I don't want it. I don't have to put up with it.

_Interviewer Paulina A_: Of course

_Destiny_: If it costs being homeless, I'll be homeless then to go through it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical</th>
<th><em>Interviewer Lucy A</em>: So ma'am you said you won't sit there and let yourself be abused again. Have you been abused before?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Destiny</em>: Yes, I have physically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Interviewer Lucy A</em>: By whom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Destiny</em>: The most recent was my kid's dad and my children are all grown and have baby... Adults now of their own that are their children. At one time my older daughter, she verbally, I mean, verbally and physically abused me and that was, yeah.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Emotional           | Not Applicable                                                                                                               |

| Financial Instability | Not Applicable                                                                                                               |

<p>| Unemployment        | <em>Interviewer Paulina A</em>: Three for sure. Okay. Well, thank you. Thank you for sharing that. So moving on to the second question, physical factors, such as limited access to healthcare problems, getting enough food, lack of physical mobility, trouble staying safe, violence, stress, unsanitary, living conditions and exposure to severe weather conditions, deteriorating physical and mental conditions or factors also play a heavy part in the cause of homelessness. I would like to ask you what physical factors caused you to become homeless? |
|                     | <em>Destiny</em>: I am Too. I'm 72 years old. I got four more months and I'll be 73. And everybody says, you look great. So that just... |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health Issues</th>
<th>Abandonment</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Immobility</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|               | Pain        | Interviewer Paulina A: So I know that we talked about psychological abuse and verbal abuse from many people in your life, as well as physical abuse. But if I may ask, do you have any physical impairments? Anything physical from you that would play a part in being homeless?

Destiny: No, I'm homeless because I'm healthy.

Interviewer Paulina A: Okay.

Destiny: I don't take any drugs on the streets. I don't have any medical problems to take any kind of medication. I don't medicate myself except for once in a great while I might get a headache and I'll take

Interviewer Paulina A: Okay.

Destiny: So I'm in physical good health.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing Instability</th>
<th>Rejection</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Betrayal</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Conflicts with Others | Trust | Interviewer Paulina A: Perfect. So the first question for you is social factors such as addiction or family tragedy, job loss, domestic violence, mental illness and many others play a heavy part in the cause of homelessness. So with that in mind, I would like to know what do you think, what social factors cause you to become homeless?

Destiny: Irritating people, irritated people. I don't know exactly how to word that.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dispute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviewer Paulina A:</strong> Could you explain a little bit more on that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Destiny:</strong> Well, I've been to different states and everything and now all my friends are dead and I don't have many children and let's see, I guess that's it. That's the most draining thing of all, I guess.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviewer Paulina A:</strong> Okay. So you would say that family tragedy, like you mentioned that your friends passing away cost you to be in a more vulnerable situation and now being homeless?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Destiny:</strong> Well, they didn't put me here, but it's just the fact that you can go from a state to a state and visit and you may have a home, but sometimes you decide to uproot and go to a different state, see your friend and everything. And well I don't know, you get old, you go with your son and next thing you know, he's got a girlfriend and mom don't fit in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviewer Paulina A:</strong> Oh, okay I see.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Destiny:</strong> It's the girl.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviewer Paulina A:</strong> Oh, okay. I understand. So there's a little bit of instability and in that matter, correct?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Destiny:</strong> Yeah, I was insulted in my face and I'm only four foot nine and she'd big, tall, five eight and she gets in my face and it's spit God on me. She called me a nasty word and I walked and now I'm here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviewer Paulina A:</strong> Sure. Thank you. So with that problem that you shared with us with the issue with the lady, let me ask you, was it a staff member that complained about your dog?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Destiny:</strong> Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviewer Paulina A:</strong> Okay. So with that conflict that happened...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Destiny: She herself in achieved, because we would be out on a smoking balcony. I mean she could be coming down the hall. My dog didn't bother her a bit. Just nothing, out on the smoking balcony, she was a smoker and she would come out there and then she'd stomp her feet and all kinds of stuff, trying to get him antagonized. And he would just look at her like she was, like what? And then that one day whenever she came and she stood in front of my wide open door, that is, I don't have a door. My startlement like that when I turned around and she's just standing there, my dog jumped off the bed and barked on her and then jumped up at her.

*Participants have fictional names due to confidentiality*

**Findings**

Three sections—Category, Code, and Meaning—were used to split the theme tables. The themes were supported by evidence drawn from the interviews and gave me insight into how particular difficulties and events appeared in the lives of these women. Due to the theme tables, I was able to clearly distinguish between the parallels and distinctions.

By contrasting and comparing the respondents, I was able to more successfully connect them with one another and create a physical representation of their experiences.

The three people—to whom I've given fictitious names of Bella, Destiny and Ashley-- to preserve their identities and maintain their confidentiality—had all experienced violence. Bella was subjected to both physical and emotional abuse. She was the victim of multiple domestic abuse incidents that were caused by her spouse and other people in her life. Destiny endured a mix of verbal and physical abuse from her kids and the father of her kids. Ashley experienced emotional abuse. While she battled a fatal illness, her spouse abandoned her. The women were furious as they related their experiences. Being hurt by the very people you trusted with your life can be highly upsetting, demoralizing, and lead to a variety of additional issues.
As was to be expected, the women faced difficulties with money. Ashley has no other source of income and is dependent on Supplemental Security Income (SSI) to make ends meet. Bella doesn't have any other income, either. Her terrible experiences have made it challenging for her to keep a job, and her former employer has failed to pay her, dating from 2018. Although Destiny has not disclosed any physical limitations, her advanced age makes it challenging for her to find a secure job.

Bella and Ashley have medical issues. Ashley had previously received a cancer diagnosis. She had a variety of procedures and therapies, including chemotherapy. She is now continuously in pain, which has limited her prospects for employment, restricted her mobility, required her to take numerous medications, and largely kept her confined to her bed. Bella experienced abuse and abandonment when she was younger, and as a result, she now experiences symptoms that can be identified as PTSD. She also admitted throughout the interview that she had a variety of physical impairments, including back issues, vision issues, cancer of the tongue and mouth, and fibromas in her feet. Destiny revealed that despite being older than Bella and Ashley, she was in good physical shape and had no signs of illness.

Ashley stated that she ended up homeless as a result of her spouse's betrayal and rejection after being diagnosed with cancer and his decision to abdicate his duties as a husband. She moved with her uncle, but after he died, Bella was evicted from this home by his family. Destiny chose to live on the streets due to external factors. Her family, including her children, their spouses, and the father of her children, had verbally and physically abused her, and she had expressed that she would rather be homeless than continue in such a position. All these women became homeless because of the actions of others. They did not choose to be homeless. Destiny,
Mental Health of Women and Homelessness

despite claiming to have chosen it, did not. Homelessness was a situation that all of these women were forced into, either through direct or indirect means.

Bella and Ashley said that they were able to develop friendships with the staff and residents after moving into the shelter. They were able to receive assistance and gained confidence in their ability to interact and communicate with others. The fact that they said they felt comfortable and that their needs were being met and catered to was most important. Destiny did have some disagreements with shelter staff about her dog, but she did not express any other concerns or disagreements with us.

Overall, the circumstances of these women's lives have left them subject to victimization in various ways, including economically, psychologically, and socially, and seeking help for their problems can be difficult. Government officials and foundation leaders, who are frequently men, often fail to comprehend the unique issues of homeless women. They frequently overlook key issues like protection, stable housing, and, in my opinion, the most important issue, mental illness. In order to maintain employment, relationships, and the ability to stay in one place (home) for an extended period of time, a person's mental health must be evaluated and treated. They cannot lead a healthy and stable life without taking these actions. A person with mental disorders will revert to their toxic environments and behaviors in the absence of assistance. As a society, we should make it a goal to provide resources that will help the most vulnerable members of our communities get back on their feet. These resources should include therapy, counseling, inpatient psychiatric hospitalization, and other forms of support. Resources indeed exist, but they are scarce and only available to a small number of individuals. We as a society may hopefully unite to increase and expand such resources after analyzing the cases of these women and their difficulties.
Conclusion

Ashley, Bella, and Destiny's tales highlight the significance of educating people about homelessness and mental illness, two issues that are frequently under or outright ignored in our culture. I believe that, even though these two issues are widespread not only in American neighborhoods but also in communities all around the world, society has not done much to lessen the pressures placed on those who live in such underprivileged conditions. The stereotypes surrounding both subjects, which frequently overlap and are unquestionably not mutually exclusive, prevent constructive dialogue from being generated to address these issues, foster irrational dread and bias against community members, and ultimately result in detrimental and erroneous ideas of people that feed disinformation and reports that drive away beneficial and life-altering resources from those communities.

Nobody chooses to be homeless or suffer from mental illness. Ashley, Bella, and Destiny did not want to be homeless; rather, they found themselves in that situation and were both directly and indirectly impacted by those in their immediate family, including their parents, spouses, and kids. We as a community, by disregarding them both directly and, dare I say, indirectly, confine people in these circumstances just like their family members did.

Homelessness and mental illness present in several ways, making it difficult to categorize or confine to a single group. In some ways, I feel it benefits the members of the community who are struggling. When we start categorizing people into single categories, the possibility of resources being created and distributed reduces and minimizes the hardships of people like Ashley, Bella, and Destiny who deal with many concerns that interact with and are influenced by multiple hurdles.
Being open to learning, keeping our eyes open, and disseminating knowledge are the best actions we can take as a group and as individuals. Visibility implies active awareness and participation rather than passivity and neglect. The tools that will help and assist people in leaving their toxic and abusive situations and environments will be easier to build with conscious and intentional efforts.

Additional research is needed because mental illness impacts so many people regularly, including myself. We must first address mental health and identify the homeless and other underprivileged members of our society before we can solve other societal problems. Then, and only then, can real, significant changes emerge.

I believe some key areas we should concentrate on are therapeutic approaches, partnerships with law enforcement to provide protection prior to and through homelessness, shelters that won't split up healthy families, sufficient healthcare, transportation, and social workers who are able to help with employment inquiries, housing programs, and other things that they may find difficult to navigate.

In the end, we all struggle. The main distinction is that certain struggles receive more attention than others and, in some instances, are better concealed. The objective of my thesis is to promote the development of more perceptive, knowledgeable, and compassionate individuals who will act as ambassadors for those who are less fortunate. Change will happen with increased inquisitiveness, research, and initiatives!

References
Available at: https://vc.bridgew.edu/undergrad_rev/vol16/iss1/6


