

Study: Hidden homelessness in Canada, 2014

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In 2014, about 2.3 million Canadians aged 15 and over—representing 8% of the population—reported that sometime in their lives they had to temporarily live with family, friends, in their car or somewhere else because they had nowhere else to live. This situation is referred to as "hidden homelessness."

The "hidden homeless" population differs from the homeless population living on the streets or in shelters. The hidden homeless are people who access accommodation but have no immediate prospect of permanent or stable housing.

The study, "[Hidden homelessness in Canada](#)," focuses on the characteristics of Canadians with a previous experience of hidden homelessness.

Of the Canadians who have experienced hidden homelessness at some point in their lives, 18% said that it had lasted for a year or more, 55% said that it lasted less than one year, but at least one month, and 27% for less than one month.

Childhood mistreatment is associated with hidden homelessness

Canadians with a history of childhood mistreatment were more likely to have experienced hidden homelessness. This is especially true for those who were victims of both physical and sexual abuse before the age of 15.

Within this group, 25% experienced hidden homelessness at some point in their lives, compared with 5% among those who did not report physical or sexual abuse as a child.

In addition, 26% of those who have been under the legal responsibility of the government as a child reported experiencing an episode of hidden homelessness, compared with less than 8% among those who were never under the responsibility of the government.

Although there appears to be a relationship between childhood experiences and hidden homelessness, it is important to note that causation cannot be implied because there is no certainty as to which event came first.

People with disabilities are more likely to experience hidden homelessness

People with a disability were also more likely to report having experienced hidden homelessness.

Those who had a mental or psychological illness (21%) or a learning disability (20%) were particularly more at risk of having experienced an episode of hidden homelessness.

The co-occurrence of disabilities also increased the odds of experiencing hidden homelessness. Specifically, those who reported at least three disabilities were four times more likely to have experienced hidden homelessness (26%) than those with no reported disability (6%).

Individuals with lower levels of social support are more likely to have experienced hidden homelessness

Although individuals who temporarily had to live with family, friends, in their car or somewhere else because they had nowhere to go may benefit from some sort of a support network, those with weaker social support were more likely to experience hidden homelessness.



For example, among those who had a "very weak" sense of belonging to their community, 14% said that they experienced hidden homelessness at least once, compared with 7% among those who had a strong sense of belonging to their community.

Similarly, among those who reported that they had no friends or relatives to whom they were close at the time of survey collection, 15% experienced hidden homelessness, compared with 7% among those who said that they had at least nine or more relatives to whom they felt close

Experiences of hidden homelessness are more frequently reported by Aboriginal people

Other socio-demographic characteristics were also associated with hidden homelessness.

Aboriginal people (that is, First Nations, Métis and Inuit) were more likely to report that they had experienced hidden homelessness (18%), compared with 8% for the non-Aboriginal population.

Other population groups more at risk of having experienced such a situation include those between the age of 25 and 54, those with a lower level of education, those who reported a sexual orientation other than heterosexual, and those who were separated or divorced.

Note to readers

This study examines the factors associated with a past experience of hidden homelessness among Canadians aged 15 years and older. The study uses data from the 2014 General Social Survey on Canadians' Safety (Victimization). The target population consisted of the non-institutionalized Canadian population aged 15 and older, living in the 10 provinces.

In 2014, questions about hidden homelessness were added for the first time to the General Social Survey on Canadians' Safety (Victimization). This concept is different from a definition of homelessness that includes only those who ever had to live on the street or in shelters.

In order to distinguish between the two concepts, all survey respondents were first asked the following question: "Have you ever been homeless, that is, having to live in a shelter, on the street, or in an abandoned building?" The following question about hidden homelessness was then asked to all respondents: "Have you ever had to temporarily live with family or friends, in your car or anywhere else because you had nowhere else to live?"

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [4504](#).

The article, "[Hidden homelessness in Canada](#)," is now available in *Insights on Canadian Society* ([75-006-X](#)). From the *Browse by key resource* module of our website, choose *Publications*.

For more information, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca).

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