

Demographic Data Project: Gender and Individual Homelessness

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This brief is the second installment of the Alliance’s *Demographic Data Project*. It analyzes 2018 Point-in-Time demographic data provided by HUD.

Homelessness in America is largely a gendered phenomenon. Men are the overwhelming majority individuals counted in the HUD-required annual Point-in-Time Count. They are also more likely than women to be unsheltered. Ending homelessness requires better understanding of the issues that cause so many men to become homeless, and the particular housing, employment, and services solutions that would best end their homelessness.

Sheltered and Unsheltered Percentages for Homeless Men and Women



While the majority of individuals who experience homelessness are men, too many women also find themselves in these circumstances. As with men, ending homelessness for women will require an understanding of the unique reasons they become homeless, how homelessness affects them, and what the solutions to their problems are.

This brief analyzes population and unsheltered data through the lens of gender, offering a fuller understanding of male and female homelessness.

Homelessness Among Men and Women at a Point-in-Time

Sixty-seven percent of all people experiencing homelessness within the 2018 Point-in-Time (PIT) Count are individuals. There are 260,284 men compared to 106,119 women. Thus, men are the majority of individuals experiencing homelessness (70 percent) followed by women (29 percent). The final 1 percent are transgender and non-binary individuals discussed in the [first installment of this series](#).

Some parts of the country skew even higher than the national average for individual male homelessness. This is true in 27 states and Puerto Rico. Examples include the following:

State	Percent of the Individual Population that Is Male
Puerto Rico	82%
Louisiana	82%
Rhode Island	76%
Connecticut	75%

At a more local level, men are the majority of individuals experiencing homelessness in almost all Continuums of Care (CoCs): 97 percent of them. There are several CoCs that have very few women as compared to men experiencing homelessness. The most dramatic of these differences is in the Youngstown/Mahoning County, OH CoC where just 8 percent of the homeless adult population is female, and 92 percent is male.

Importantly, there are some states where the percentage of individual women (versus men) who are homeless is significantly higher than it is nationally. The following states had female homelessness percentages well above the 29 percent national average:

State	Percent of the Individual Population that are Women
Maine	38%
Alaska	37%
Missouri	37%
North Dakota	37%
Arkansas	36%
Hawaii	34%
Vermont	34%
Oregon	34%

While this pattern of a majority male homeless individual population holds true across most regions of the country, there are eleven CoCs where most of the individuals counted were women. They tend to have relatively small numbers of individuals experiencing homelessness:

CoC	Total Homeless Count	Percent of the Individual Population that are Women
MD-510 Garrett County	8	88%
MI-523 Eaton County	10	70%
AR-505 Southeast Arkansas	53	66%
KS-505 Overland Park, Shawnee/Johnson County	64	63%
MA-517 Somerville	100	56%
PA-511 Bristol, Bensalem/Bucks County	194	56%
AR-512 Boone, Baxter, Marion, Newton Counties	42	55%

NY-514 Jamestown, Dunkirk/Chautauqua County, NY	94	53%
IL-515 South Central Illinois	44	52%
MO-500 St Louis County	258	52%
MA-502 Lynn	128	49%

Unsheltered Homelessness

Unsheltered homelessness has been on the rise over the last two years. Nationally, men are only slightly more likely than women to be unsheltered. Forty-nine percent of individual men are unsheltered compared to 45 percent of women.

However, this delicate balance doesn't exist everywhere. There are some parts of the country where individual men are far more likely to be unsheltered than their female counterparts. Here are a few examples:

Jurisdiction	Percent of Individual Men Unsheltered	Percent of Individual Women Unsheltered
Texas	58%	42%
Illinois	32%	18%
Colorado	41%	51%
Prince George's County, MD	50%	18%
Marion County, FL	68%	36%
Las Vegas/Clark County, NV	63%	78%
Rockland County, NY	14%	56%

At a local level, there are 120 CoCs in 30 states where 50 percent or more of individual homeless men are unsheltered. In 49 of those CoC's, the share of men experiencing unsheltered homelessness is 75% or greater.

Unsheltered homelessness also affects women, sometimes more than men. In 14 states, the percentage of women who are unsheltered outpaces the percentage of men (although as mentioned, the actual number of men is still much higher than that of women).

State	Percent of Individual Women Unsheltered	Percent of Men Unsheltered
Colorado	51%	41%
Delaware	16%	12%
Hawaii	71%	70%

Idaho	44%	39%
Kansas	24%	23%
Massachusetts	15%	14%
Maryland	32%	31%
Maine	7%	6%
Nebraska	10%	7%
New Hampshire	18%	17%
Nevada	67%	56%
Ohio	18%	17%
South Carolina	40%	35%
Tennessee	41%	36%

There are 97 CoCs in which more than half of individual homeless women are unsheltered. In 78 of those jurisdictions, 75 percent or more of the individual homeless women are unsheltered.

Various studies on unsheltered homelessness indicate a multitude of outcomes like long-term homelessness, mortality, and poor health. While men are more likely to be unsheltered and have elevated risks of mortality, women who are unsheltered have a much higher risk of premature mortality largely due to mental health and chronic health issues (Montgomery, Szymkowiak, & Culhane, 2017). The rates of victimization and assault, including robbery, physical abuse, and sexual assault are much higher for women than men (Montgomery, Szymkowiak, & Culhane, 2017), (Nyamathi, Leake, & Gelberg, 2000).

Rate of Homelessness

The rate of homelessness per 10,000 people is another important indicator to evaluate when trying to understand the scope of homelessness in the U.S. Nationally, 21.5 men and 8.3 women experience homelessness per 10,000 people in the general population. The eight places with the highest rates of men experiencing homelessness are also the places with the highest rates of women. Washington, D.C. has the highest rate of homelessness among individual men at 104.6, double the next highest rate in California. The rate for individual homeless women in D.C. is 34.4 which is almost double the rate for California at 19.9.

State	Male Homelessness Rate	Female Homelessness Rate
D.C.	104.6	34.4
CA	52.5	19.9
HI	48.5	25.2
OR	46.8	23.4
NV	45.8	17.6
WA	40.1	17.6
NY	36.5	15
AK	31	20.2

Discussion

Focusing on equity and fairness requires asking the question of why men are so overrepresented in the homeless population.

Many of the answers are found outside of the homelessness system. For example, men are overrepresented in the criminal justice system and, “roughly 48,000 people entering shelters every year are coming nearly directly from prisons or jails” (Cho, 2015). Another example is the education system, which many experts suggest is failing boys who are more likely to drop out and experience suspensions/expulsions (GAO, 2018; NCES, *Fast Facts* 2019). Limited educational experience results in poor employment prospects, increasing the risk of poverty and homelessness (See NCES, *Employment and Unemployment Rates*, 2019).

But many of the answers may lie within the homelessness system, in the setting of priorities and the allocation of resources. Equity is not the only consideration of homelessness systems, which often and quite rationally prioritize things like vulnerability age, or risk of violence as opposed to serving men and women equally. But collecting, analyzing and using data to examine disparities and consider whether a proper level of assistance is being provided to over-represented and/or under-served groups may result in a better balance and a more equitable community system. Questions that communities might ask themselves in this process include the following:

- Can we do more to serve individual adults, especially men?
- Are we accurately counting different gender groups? Is there something about our practices that leads us to count more men or women?
- Does the unsheltered data tell us anything about barriers or ineffective programming for males or females that results in them not being sheltered?
- What differences in approach need to be taken for males and females?
- Once disparities are identified, are we moving beyond the data to get information directly from consumers as to their needs?

The issues of equity and effectiveness in a vastly under-resourced system are not easily addressed; nor is there any universally correct approach. But these are questions that deserve to be considered, and examination of data is one way to begin that community conversation.

About this Data

The data in this brief comes from HUD’s 2018 Point-in-Time Count. It is collected by CoCs, informing local efforts and being aggregated into annual report published by HUD. The information is self-reported by consumers or based on observational data by a volunteer conducting surveys for the Count. The data may also be extrapolated to estimate a total number of people experiencing homelessness in areas too large for a full street count.

Because CoC’s report the data to HUD in aggregate, there are limitations on the ability to fully analyze the data at the intersections of identity. For example, we are unable to produce analysis that focuses on black women or men over the age of 55.

This, however, is the most comprehensive country-wide data available on men and women experiencing homelessness. It should be used to foster a discussion in each community and be used as a conversation piece for reaching out to experts in the area.

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