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HOMELESSNESS AND EXPERIENCES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA IN THE WESTERN WORLD: A RESEARCH REVIEW AND A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Over the last forty years, and particularly within the last decade, homelessness is recognised as a multifaceted problem. Homelessness is associated with poverty, because the ability to access employment is limited by the lack of a stable address. Secondly, homeless people often experience severe difficulties with housing related services, health services and education. These problems are often sustained or exacerbated by, e.g., poor physical and mental health and the need to support alcohol or drug dependencies. What role does traumatic events, in particular childhood trauma and abuse, have in the lives of the homeless? The negative effects of psychological trauma on psychosocial functioning and wellbeing in the general population are well documented; a quick review of the research on homelessness and trauma suggested that more work is needed.

The objectives of this paper are to review research on homelessness and experiences of psychological trauma and evidence from a sample of single homeless adults.

The aim of this paper is two-fold: to provide a systematic review of studies on the relationship between childhood trauma and homelessness and to present findings from a qualitative study of adult people who are homeless in London and Nottingham, UK.

The systematic review examines research published in the Western world, 1990 - July 2010. The qualitative study collected data through semi-structured interviews with 103 single people, aged 18-69 years.

A summary of the results from the review and qualitative study and guidance for further research on the relationships between traumatic experiences and homelessness will be provided.