

## It's Not What It Seems: Women In Low Income Families

Throughout my thirteen years living in New York City, walking past homeless people has been engraved into my daily routine. When you live in a place that is nearly immune to the sight of homelessness, you tend to overlook people living on the street in your own day to day life. On my way to school I look past the man asking for money at the subway entrance or the woman in rags, sleeping on a bench, seeking warmth. Have I become callous towards people in need? What would happen if I experienced homelessness? Would I become transparent?

Homelessness is a major problem in the United States, and as hard as it is to be homeless, it is even harder being a homeless woman. "Two trends are largely responsible for the rise in homelessness over the past 20-25 years: a growing shortage of affordable rental housing and a simultaneous increase in poverty."<sup>1</sup> These are two significant trends because these women already have to pay for necessities for their health and wellbeing which makes it almost impossible for them to buy a house because of how expensive houses have gotten. Homeless women become homeless because of poverty and shortage of housing, but also because of dynamics that apply specifically to women. According to the National Alliance To End Homelessness, "92% of homeless women have experienced severe sexual physical assault at some point in their lives." According to the Colorado Coalition For The Homeless, "57% of homeless women cite sexual or domestic violence as the direct cause of their homelessness." This is because sometimes when women are sexually abused, it leads to unwanted pregnancies. The mother is not always prepared for a baby, and she might not have enough money to take care of one. Learning about these statistics helped me understand what factors contributed to homelessness and how it

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<sup>1</sup> For the Homeless, National Coalition. "The National Coalition for the Homeless." National Coalition for the Homeless, [nationalhomeless.org/](http://nationalhomeless.org/).

specifically affects women.

It is encouraging to know there are many organizations that dedicate their focus to issues such as sexual assault, homelessness, and affordable housing. One organization that focuses on aiding homeless women in need is Distributing Dignity, which gives “*NEW bras and feminine hygiene products (pads, tampons & pantliners) to non-profit organizations that provide services to women in need.*” Donating at a domestic violence shelter is also helpful to women affected by both homelessness and domestic abuse. We must continue to provide necessities, from counselling to medical care, for homeless women to better their situation and get them back on their feet.