

African immigrants homeless in Minnesota

Fact sheet: Minnesota statewide homeless study, 2006

In the October 2006 statewide survey of homeless persons, 82 individuals were interviewed who reported that they were immigrants from Africa. This fact sheet provides a brief description of those individuals and their circumstances. They represent slightly under 2 percent of all the adults, and slightly over 3 percent of all the unaccompanied youth, who were identified as homeless on the date of the survey.

Background characteristics

African natives in the 2006 homeless survey included 77 adults (age 18 or older) and five unaccompanied youth (age 17 or younger). Just over half (43) were male, and 39 were female. Twenty-two of the adults had children with them. Most (64, or just over three-quarters) were in the seven-county metropolitan area, and 18 were in the remaining 80 counties of greater Minnesota.

Six of the homeless African immigrants were staying in battered women's shelters, 23 were in emergency shelters, and 39 were in transitional housing programs. Fourteen were not using the formal shelter system.

Many (50) had been homeless for a year or longer, including 19 who had been homeless for at least three years. Almost all the rest (29) had been homeless for a month or longer. Only three had been homeless for less than a month.

One-third (27) were homeless for the first time. However, four in ten (34) had experienced homelessness three or more times in their lives, including 11 who reported eight more such episodes. Another 11 did not know how many times they had been homeless.

Nearly one-third (26) had at least some post-secondary education, and just over one-quarter (22) had completed high school but no more. Thirty-four had less than a high school education.

Barriers to housing

African immigrants report that their primary barriers to housing are the lack of jobs or income (cited by 31) and lack of affordable housing (cited by 19). Other factors cited by at least five people included a criminal record (7), credit problems (6), and the cost of application fees (5).

Answers to other questions in the interview give some hints about additional problems that may make it hard for these individuals to get or keep housing.

These include:

- Serious mental illness (40)
- A physical, mental, or other condition that limits the amount or type of work they can do (27)
- A current health problem or physical disability (19)
- Problems with confusion, memory, or decision-making that interferes with daily activities (19)
- A head injury with probable traumatic brain injury (16)
- A diagnosed substance abuse disorder (14)

In addition, although only seven mentioned a criminal history as a current problem interfering with housing, 14 reported having been incarcerated at some time in their lives, which is often a barrier both to employment and to housing.

Employment and income

Forty percent, or 33, of these individuals were employed, although only nine were employed full-time (35 or more hours per week). Over one-quarter (22) received income in October from steady employment, and another 13 received income from day or temporary labor. For the 72 individuals who reported a current monthly income, the average was \$501.

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Besides employment, other common sources of income were:

- General Assistance (19)
- MFIP (Minnesota's family welfare program) (16)
- Asking for money on the streets (10)
- Relatives or friends (8)

Service use

In the past 12 months, 51 African immigrants had received public medical benefits, 45 had received Food Stamps, and 15 had participated in the Women, Infants, & Children food program (WIC).

In the month of the survey, the services most commonly received (and the number who reported receiving each) were:

- Food Stamps (42)
- Free or almost free clothing shelves (34)
- Hot meal programs (31)
- Transportation assistance (30)
- Drop-in centers (27)
- Food shelves (22)
- Free medical clinic (20)
- Job training (12) and help to find a job (18)
- Help accessing financial or other public benefits (16)

About one-third of the group (28) reported that they needed help to apply or re-apply for some services or benefits. The services for which they most often wished for help were:

- Public medical benefits (19)
- Food Stamps (13)
- Unemployment benefits (4)

Summary

The results show that there were at least 82 African immigrants who were homeless on the night of the 2006 statewide survey of homelessness in Minnesota. These individuals represent just under 2 percent of homeless adults, and just over 3 percent of homeless youth in the state.

Although a high proportion were working, few had full-time jobs, and many had significant disabilities that interfere with employment as well as housing. Some were accessing mainstream supportive services, but one-third reported they needed help to apply for services.

About the study

In the statewide study conducted every three years since 1991, trained volunteers conduct interviews with adults and unaccompanied youth who are in emergency shelters, battered women's shelters, or transitional housing programs, or who are staying in places not meant for habitation.

More information about the study, including an overview of the overall findings, can be found on the Wilder Research website (www.wilderresearch.org).

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For more information

This summary presents highlights of the 2006 *Statewide Study of Homelessness*. For more information about this report, contact Ellen Shelton at Wilder Research, 651-647-4600.

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