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The Influence of Neighborhood Cohesion on Homelessness in Cache Valley, Utah

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I. Introduction

- The 2017 Utah Point in Time Count reported that 2,852 Utah residents were identified as being homeless (Utah Housing and Community Development Division, 2017).
- There is a large gap in research that explores one's likelihood of becoming homeless and its relation to community integration and neighborhood cohesion. Community integration can be defined through the feelings of acceptance within one's social network(s), sharing common norms and values with those around you. (Sayer, et al., 2011) Neighborhood cohesion is the sense of shared morals and trust within a neighborhood community.
- Current bodies of knowledge in social science literature discuss other causes of homelessness, but do not mention community integration and neighborhood cohesion. The primary goal of this research is to explore the effects that community integration and neighborhood cohesion have on homelessness.
- Community integration and neighborhood cohesion may be factors that protect individuals from becoming homeless. However, these factors may also have a negative effect on one's housing situation.



Figure 1. Photo retrieved from the article *Salt Lake City Holds Event to Give Homeless People Help and Hugs* written by Katherine Taylor and published on October 2, 2017 on UPR.org.

II. Methods

- Data from this study is derived from a larger community-based research project where 828 participants were surveyed in a tri-county Utah area (Box, Rich and Cache counties) and online. The sample was made up mostly of female respondents and close to half of the respondents were homeowners. The average age of the sample was 37 years and 31% of the respondents identified as university students.
- Figure 1 shows the level of social cohesion that participants reported. The higher the score, the higher the level of community integration. For the purpose of this research project, social cohesion can be defined as a sense of harmony among multiple individuals that influences their overall well-being. Higher scores from respondents indicate higher levels of social cohesion. Figure 2 shows specific variables that are indicative of an individual's likelihood of becoming homeless or an individual's prior experiences of homelessness.
- Homeless experience was measured by asking participants if they had slept at a friends' house, a family members' house, emergency shelter or a place not fit for human habitation within the last one- and five-year time frames.



Figure 2. Photo by AP Photographer Rick Bowmer. Retrieved from MSN.com's article titled *Once a National Model, Utah Struggles with Homelessness* by Gregory Scruggs.

III. Results

Figure 3. Social Cohesion Results

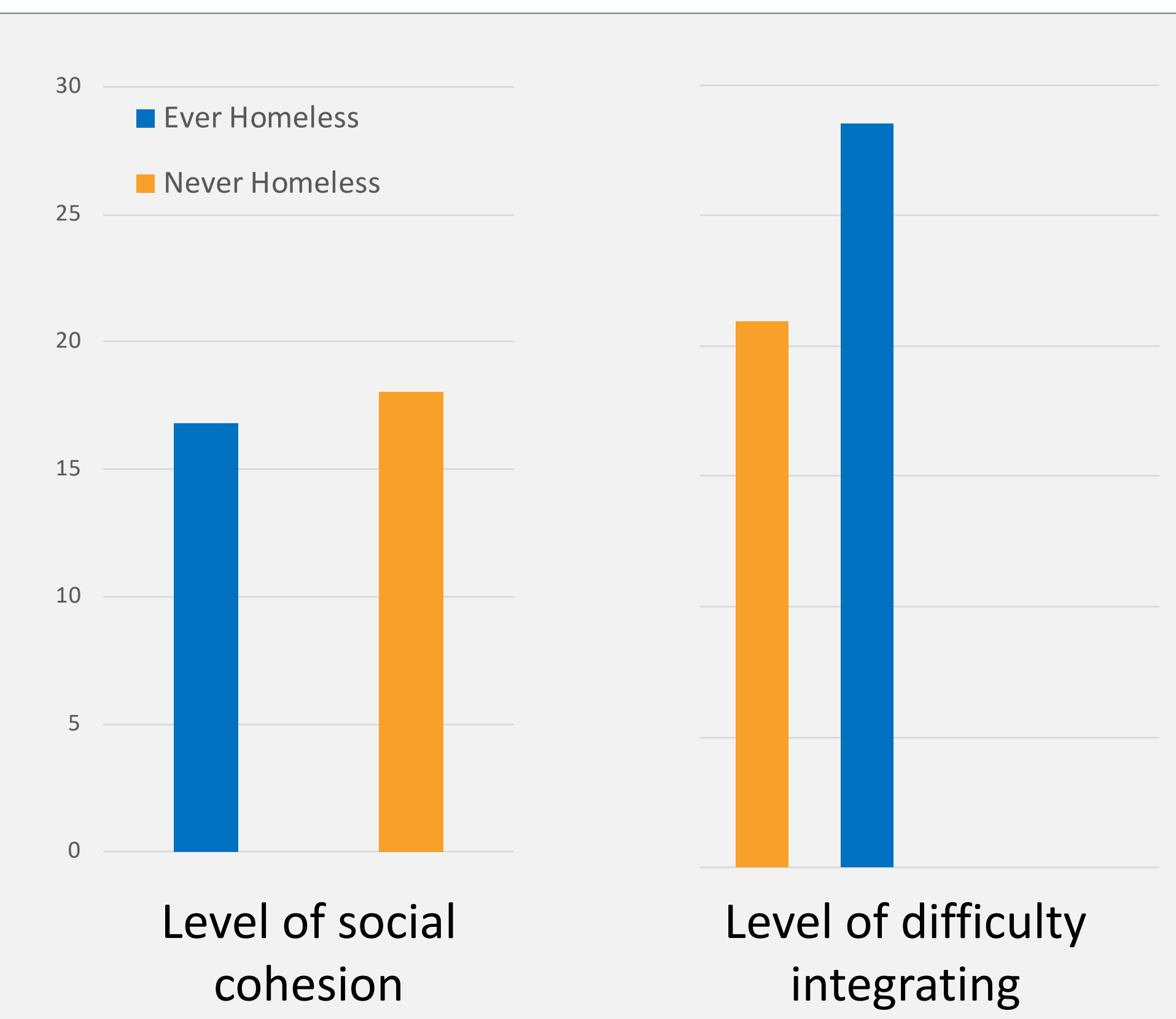
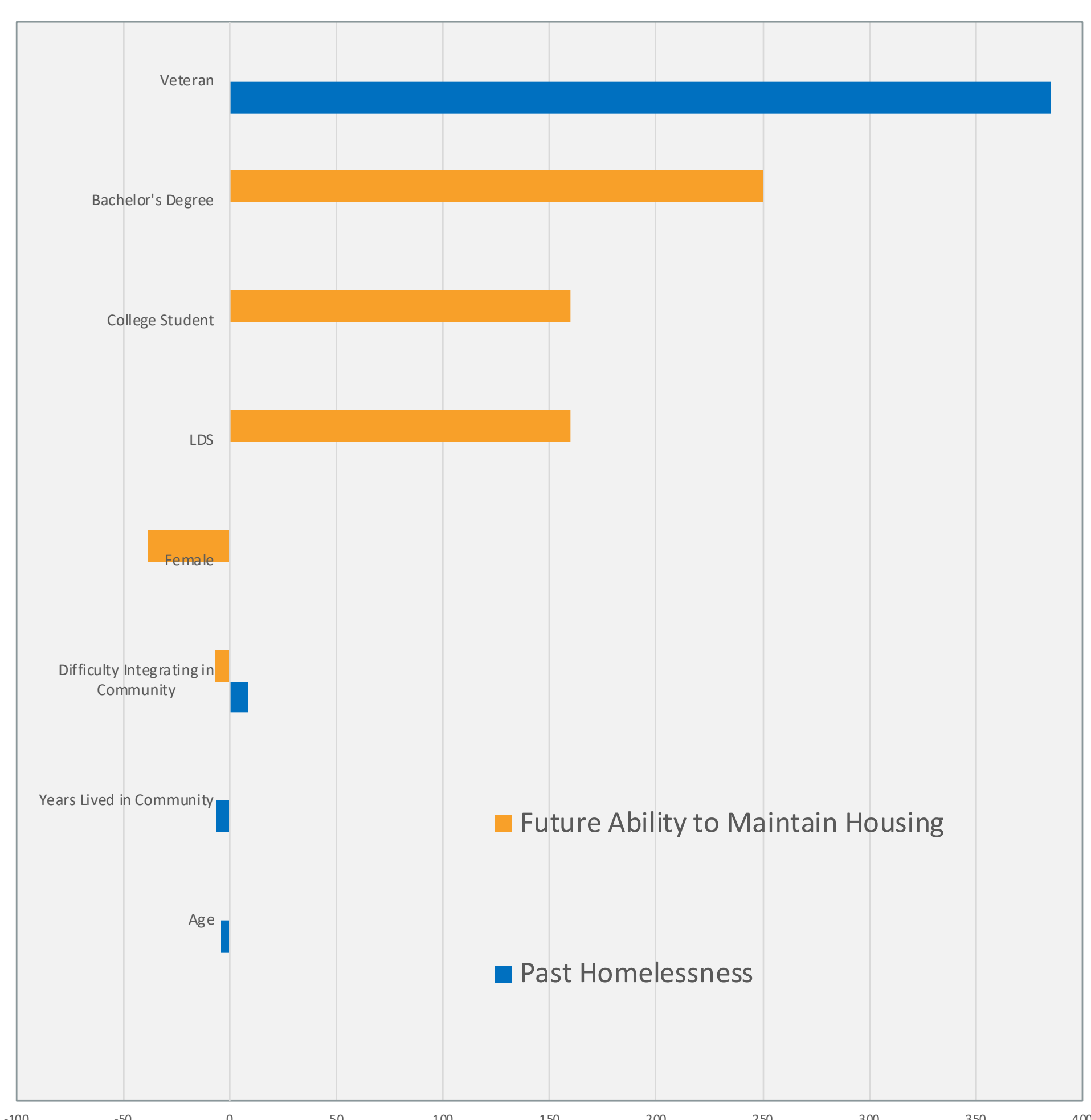


Figure 4. Logistic Regression Results



This data is the result of a logistic regression examining risk factors associated with homelessness to survey respondents' past experiences with homelessness or their future risk of being homeless. The points on the above graph (-100 to 400) represent odds ratios that are associated with increases and decreases in the data.

Data Analysis Results

- 12% of respondents had experienced some form of homelessness in the last five years and 5.7% in the last one year.
- On average, participants who had experienced homelessness had lower levels of social cohesion and greater difficulty integrating within their community ($M=16.80$, $SD=6.49$); compared to those who had not, ($M=18.03$, $SD=6.26$). Similarly, participants who had experienced homelessness had greater difficulty integrating in their community ($M=28.52$, $SD=9.81$) compared to those who had not been homeless ($M=20.92$, $SD=7.96$).
- 24.2% of respondents stated that they would not be able to finance new housing if they were evicted from their current home or residence.

IV. Implications

- The results of this research have the potential to inform intervention at the community level within the state of Utah.
- Findings suggest the importance of social cohesion and community integration as avenues for change.
- This research has the potential to influence the way homeless-prevention interventions are implicated though suggesting neighborhood interventions and education of the community about the factors that surround homelessness. This this newfound knowledge to create a more accepting, welcoming and integrative neighborhood.
- Community-level interventions that build social cohesion and increase community integration can protect vulnerable populations from experiencing homelessness. Vulnerable individuals are also protected from other adverse effects of being homeless, such as a lack of safety, a lack of food and shelter, and protection from victimization.

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