

Good essay about the problem of homelessness in the united states

[Food & Diet](#)



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Introduction

One of the many problems which concern the United States government is the problem of homelessness. According to government statistics, more than 600, 000 people were homeless in the year 2012. (Donohoe, 2004). The department of housing and urban development (HUD) recognizes the following persons or families as homeless –

- **Those individuals or families who are homeless at the time of reckoning.**

- Those individuals or families who may become homeless in the near future.
- Those individuals or families who have unstable homes due to domestic violence or other hardships.

The homeless are further classified into the following broad categories –

- Current homeless without shelter
- Current homeless with shelter
- Current homeless due to institutional release
- Imminent homeless
- Home instability caused by hardships.
- Home instability caused by domestic violence.

Causes of Homelessness

Homelessness is generally perceived as individuals living on the streets with barely enough food and clothing to sustain a decent living. In fact, the homeless consist of many families with children. These families have usually been struck by disaster. An event which altered their lives and forced them out of their homes and into the streets. These events may be domestic

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violence, divorce, death of a loved one, family disputes or loss of job.

Individuals with mental disorders which are left untreated also often become homeless. For those in the low income bracket, life events like divorce, major illnesses and loss of job may cause bankruptcy. Such people are left with no option but to turn out into the streets. With no permanent address to register, finding jobs becomes difficult, and putting food on the table becomes a daily challenge.

Homeless shelters run by NGO's and other voluntary organizations like the church provide food and shelter for such people. Governments subsidies help run these shelters. (Vanneman, 2006)

Consequences of Homelessness

The effect of homelessness on individuals is brutal. When an individual or family first becomes homeless, they worry about returning to normalcy. If no support is forthcoming and the individuals fail to gain employment, they go into the deep depression and are ultimately unable to think rationally and apply the skills one possesses to gain fruitful employment. The worry of not have a roof over the head bears down on the individual and the family and blocks out all other rational thought. Over time, the depression caused by homelessness itself becomes a cause for continuing to remain homeless.

As individuals and families fail to return to normalcy, their diet becomes progressively unstable and unhealthy. This leads to deterioration of health and causes various diseases. The unclean unkempt look which the homeless acquire, because they do not have the facilities for washing, cleaning and other basic personal functions, makes them social outcasts. This further adds to their sense of despair and hopelessness and they adopt desperate means

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like panhandling, garbage picking, thievery and alcohol to seek relief. (Crisis, 2008).

Theory of Homelessness

The problem of homelessness is not restricted to the United States but is spread all over the globe. If one were to classify the problem as sociological or economical, it would fall in both categories. Identifying a specific sociological theory for the problem is another matter. Different sociologists would look at the problem in different ways.

Functionalists - Homeless people struggle to survive the problems of the day to day life. They lead a very meager existence. Sleeping in doorways, rag picking and living of scraps of discarded food retrieved from garbage cans, washing in ditches and drains and so on. Homelessness is, therefore, the burden on society. The functionalist theory demands that all members of society be brought to a minimum standard of living so that they can make their contribution to society.

Interactional Theory - The interactional theory states that society is what people construct by interaction. (Macionis, 2012). However, interaction that occurs between the homeless and the various economic and social strata of society is more ostracic in nature. That is the homeless are ostracized from most groups because of the quality of their lives. This discourages them and even offends them. Employers are unwilling to hire them because they do not have any fixed address, proof of academic qualifications, or experience. This further discourages the homeless and is often the cause of anti-social activity.

Other sociological theories may be applied to the problem of homelessness but that is beyond the scope of this paper. (McMorrow-Hernandez, 2007).

Impact on Society

Homelessness is a vicious circle and society is caught up in it. The first and most obvious impact of homelessness is the increasing number of panhandlers, garbage pickers, and pickpockets which are a nuisance to society. The public demands that the government “do something” about the problem.

The government then issues orders for arresting homeless people. When a homeless individual is caught, the arresting officer is required to issue a ticket and check a person’s identity which is often unavailable. The person then has to be taken to jail and detained. Food and clothing have to be provided for the individual. All this costs money which is paid out of the taxpayers’ dollar.

After the arrest, an individual’s constitutional right demands that he be offered a fair trial. A lawyer is then assigned to take the case of the arrested individual. A day at court costs several of the taxpayers’ dollars in lawyers’ fees, judges’ compensation and other administrative costs.

The other alternative is to provide facilities for the homeless. This is done by non-profit organizations. These organizations are also partly funded by the government. However since the funding is not adequate, proper facilities cannot be provided. Also often, the homeless are unwilling to avail of these facilities, either because they are new homeless who feel ashamed of availing the facility or are hopeful of getting gainful employment, or because they are in the throes of depression and find panhandling or garbage-picking

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an easier and more profitable alternative.

Places where the homeless are highly visible become less profitable as tourist spots and result in a loss in government revenue. Stealing of food, attending to calls of nature at any convenient place, and costs of cleaning up areas occupied by the homeless are some of the other impacts on society. (Collingwood).

Conclusion

The homeless in America and all over the world are a burden on society. Since it is the burden of society, it is the responsibility of society to deal with it. From the foregoing discussion, it is obvious that it is the honest tax-payer, who ultimately pays to maintain the homeless. In effect, what we are doing is allowing a section of society to exist without making any useful contribution.

The only way to rid society of this burden is to make the homeless honest tax-paying individuals. Instead of making them social outcasts, we can sympathize with them, offer them gainful employment and help restore them to a "normal" status. If we start in the beginning when people first become homeless and make every attempt to restore those who are in our contact, the problem can be resolved largely. After all "Charity begins at home".

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