

Homelessness



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Hassan ALfahker 107_____ Homelessness Introduction The number of homeless people in the United States has considerably increased during the past two decades and homelessness has turned to be one of the most significant issues faced by the nation today. The reasons of homelessness vary from shortage of affordable housing, employment or low wages, to poverty. Similarly, homelessness can have adverse physical, social, emotional and psychological impacts on the victims. This paper seeks to define homelessness, identify its demographic characteristics, and explore the various consequences of the issue on its victims.

Causes

There are a number of factors that have contributed towards homelessness in the nation. The National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH), in this regard, identifies two dominant trends that have been responsible for the rise of homelessness: “ a growing shortage of affordable rental housing and a simultaneous increase in poverty” (National Coalition for the Homeless, Why Are People Homeless?). Poverty and homelessness are interrelated as poor people very often are forced to sacrifice their desire for housing in order to meet other basic needs food, clothing and healthcare. Unemployment, unstable employment, low-wages, lack of affordable housing for the poor, excessive waiting lists for public housing, and decline in public assistance are other significant predictors for homelessness (NCH, Why Are People Homeless?).

Definition and Demographics

It is worthwhile to review the definition of homelessness and to identify the dominant demographic characteristics of homelessness in the nation.

Homeless people are defined as “ individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and

adequate nighttime residence;” this definition takes into account people who share the housing of others; people who live in motels or camping grounds; people who are in emergency or transitional shelters; abandoned children who await foster care placement; and migratory children (NCH, Who is Homeless?). Reviewing the demographic characteristics 39% of the homeless population comprised of children below the age of 18 whereas 25% of the homeless were individuals in the age category of 25 to 34 (NCH, Who is Homeless?). Similarly, males were more likely to be homeless than females. However, homeless families with children have considerably increased in the past decade. Regarding the ethnicity of homelessness, African-Americans form the majority of the homeless population (49%) followed by Caucasian (35%), Hispanic (23%), Native American (2%), and 1% of Asians (NCH, Who is Homeless?). It has also been observed by NCH that victims of domestic violence, veterans, people with mental illness and people suffering from addiction disorders are more likely to be homeless than others.

Effects

The adverse effects of homelessness on the affected population are many and varied. Children are most likely to be affected by homelessness physically, mentally, socially, emotionally and psychologically. In this respect, Hart-Shegos points out that homelessness adversely affects the child from his conception to young adulthood and that “ the experience of homelessness inhibits the physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and behavioral development of children” (Hart-Shegos 2). It is a fact that many of the homeless women (most of whom are single) lack sufficient prenatal care, healthy pregnancies, and are exposed to various health related problems.

This can hamper the physical and emotional well-being of children. Similarly, it has also been found that children born to homeless mothers are exposed to ‘ environmental factors that can endanger their health;’ lack essential immunizations; experience significant developmental delays when they grow up; and may face social seclusion and academic backwardness when they reach schools (Hart-Shegos 2). Such children are also likely to suffer from low levels of positive self-esteem or confidence.

Conclusion

There is also the danger of homeless population turning to criminal activities and socially undesirable behaviors. It has been observed that “ homeless individuals are more likely to commit crime than the domiciled” and homeless youth in particular are quite vulnerable towards criminal activities and anti-social behaviors (Homelessness — Causes & Effects: A Review of the Literature 40). Thus, it can be concluded that the issue of Homelessness calls for radical governmental interventions and public policy changes, changes in employment and wage patterns and the construction of more affordable houses for the poor.

Works Cited

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