

# Homelessness paper essay



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Homelessness is defined as “ An Individual who lacks a fixed regular and adequate nighttime residence”, (Burt, 1989, p. 17).

Have you ever stopped to wonder how many people are Homeless? Who are most at risk to fall into this situation? I highly doubt it. While most people really do not care and ignore homeless people, others look at them as motivation, people whom they do not want to become. Another question that comes to mind is, how do homeless people survive and what are their legal rights. What causes people to become Homeless is it a choice or a failure of society? Do homeless individual have the same perspective on life and show the same emotions as ordinary people do.

What can we do to help stop homelessness? These are the topics that I will be briefly addressing in my paper. The study of homelessness for the past couple of years has been very complex and difficult to come by. From what I learned during this research, most of the statistics on homeless people are sometimes inaccurate. Researchers use different methods to measure homelessness. One method attempts to count all the people who are literally homeless on a given day or during a given week, this is called point-in-time counts.

While the second method examines the number of people who are homeless over a given period of time, this is called (period prevalence counts). Point-in-time studies give a snap-shot picture of homelessness; they only count those individuals who are homeless at a particular time. Period prevalence addresses the problem of homelessness more accurately, because some of these people will eventually find housing and escape homelessness making it

a temporary condition. There is another issue involved in counting the number of homeless people in America.

Many homeless people will not be counted because they are not in places where researchers can find them. These groups of people are often referred to as "the unsheltered or hidden homeless", (Burt, 1989 p. 18). These people stayed in automobiles (59.2%), camp grounds, boxes, caves or boxcars (24.6%).

This would state that homeless counts would miss a vast majority of people and give false information. A perfect example of this would be Sociologist Peter Rossi who came under attack by the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, for having researched the homeless population far below the Coalition's estimate. His response to this was "In the short term, good social research will often be greeted as a betrayal of one or another side to a particular controversy", (Schaefer, 2004, p. 41).

In a study made by the Urban Institute 2000, stated that approximately 3.5 million people, 1.35 of which were children are likely to experience homelessness in a given point in time. The homeless population is a diverse group.

"Over the past year, over 3 million men, women and children were homeless", (nlchp.org, p. 1). When I first looked at the number I could not believe my eyes, but in fact they were real. Among the homeless, 41% are single men, 14% are single women, 5% are unaccompanied children, 40% are families with children, 67% are single parent families, 23% mentally

disabled, 10% veterans, 50% African Americans, 35% White, 12% Hispanic, 2% Native Americans and the list goes on.

In many cases a person does not choose to be homeless, it is the decisions that they make throughout life or unpleasant situations that lead to becoming homeless. An example I can share would be a relative of mine who experienced being homeless at a very young age. My dear cousin, who is now 22, was forced to leave her household at the age of 13 with her mother. She begins by telling me that, it all started when her parents got divorced.

She stated that " I felt lonely and scared, even though I had my mother I was not used to living or sleeping outside of my household", (Machado, 2005). Since her mother could not support themselves financially, she started to fall behind on her various bills. This eventually led to losing their house and having to live in homeless shelters. To make a long story short, this would be an example of choosing whether to stay homeless or blaming society for what has happened.

Over time they turned their lives around and were able to obtain a small yet comfortable apartment where she lived with her mother. When my cousin told me all that she went through I felt sorry for what had happened, but she said " It was an experience that I do not wish upon anyone, but it also made me appreciate all the little things that I did not have when I was in the shelter", (Machado, 2005). This goes to show you that it can happen to anyone, but it becomes an individual's choice whether to get out of it or simply stay homeless. For the most part I believe that children are most at risk of becoming homeless.

An adult man or woman can manage being homeless out in the streets. This would not be the case if it were a child, because a child can not make decisions or have any notion of survival skills. Homeless people are often found in various places. Some of these places include libraries, shelters, soup kitchens, public health clinics, park benches, bus stations and etc. These are just a few of the places that we know of. The Average cost for a night of lodging in a crisis shelter including all services is \$19.

Costs are slightly lower per night in shelters with a bed capacity of 51 or more and higher in smaller shelters bed capacity of 50 or less. Homeless people often use Federal Programs such as McKinney-Vento Education, Health Care for the Homeless or Emergency Food & Shelter Grants. This is how they survive out in society. The U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development gave an estimate in 1984 of “ 111, 000 persons can be housed in emergency shelters nationwide on any given night”, (Caton, 1990, p.

111). Some shelters however have restrictions were they do not allow single adult women, women and children and single adult men. This is primarily due to communal sleeping and bath accommodations and inadequate staff to monitor a two sex situation. Another program that I looked into was Halfway Houses, where residents are supervised by psychiatrists and other medical and support services. Residents typically work outside of the home during the day and share meals and other household chores. These programs however are for those homeless people whom have mental-illnesses that can not survive out in the normal world without some type of medication.

Panhandling is very common in the streets; this would be the act of begging for money out on the corners of streets. Homeless people unlike us have to look for these resources for survival, if they did not exist they would either die of hunger or people would mostly likely kill them. You would think the homeless people do not have rights but in actuality they do. An example of this entails food stamp programs, unlike ordinary people when applying for this, homeless people do not need permanent addresses. They are entitled to purchase their own food when living in shelters that do not supply them with cooking. What causes people to become homeless? There are many factors involved in answering this questioning.

One question that I ask my self is, Homelessness is it a choice or a failure of society. The Lack of Affordable Housing leads to Homelessness in most cases. An individual working full time, " Has to earn an average of \$15.21/hour to be able to afford rent for a modest two-bedroom home", (NLCHP, 2004). Another problem surrounding the homeless is that there are not enough resources made available to help them.

There are more homeless people in the United States than there are shelters. Another factor involves drugs, alcohol and mental health problems. Most homeless people that you find either have a drug and alcohol addiction or have some type of mental illness. In these cases rehabilitation or medical procedures have to take place in order to help these individuals out. There are other issues involved in becoming homeless, such as abuse, neglect and adults getting divorced. Like in my cousin's case, whose father divorced her mother, which ultimately led to them becoming homeless.

In my opinion homelessness is caused by society and choices that homeless individuals make during their life. I say this because in doing my research, there are many programs and federal aid made available to homeless people. Now if you do not care about the situation that you are in and wish to stay the way that you are, than you ignore all these possibilities and continue on with your bad streak. On the other hand if you do wish to get out, then all it takes is time and effort from your part. Now from my perspective, I could not begin to imagine how it would feel to be alone and homeless. I have gotten so use to having a household and all the conveniences that it has become second nature to me.

An ordinary person, (by this I mean someone who is financially stable) has different views on life than a homeless person would have. An Ordinary person wakes up in the morning thinking about work, family, money, food and etc. While this is similar to a homeless person's thoughts, an ordinary person does not have to beg for money since they obtain a job. They have no need to search for remains in a dumpster to feed themselves, because they can easily go to a restaurant and buy something.

It is horrible to have to wake up everyday under a bridge or under a cardboard box knowing that it might be your last. This is why you will see homeless individuals develop a drug addiction, alcoholism and sometimes even go mentally insane. There are many ways that we can help to eradicate homeless people or homelessness all together. One way is to get to know some homeless people.

Most times what makes this difficult is the fear homeless people stir up in us. As odd as it might sound, these fears make it important for us to get to know some homeless people before trying to do anything helpful. You might want to start off by volunteering at soup kitchens, shelters, or public health clinics. These are all great places to meet individuals who might need your company or help. Another approach would be to stop portraying the homeless as “victims”.

The problem with this is that seeing people as victims can dehumanize them and make them seem too different from yourself. This kind of perception faintly stimulates the breakdown of human community because for all of its intended sympathy, it divides humanity in classes of “them” versus “us”. Homeless people are often the victims of forces they do not control, such as the cost of housing versus take-home pay or a factory closing. As long as you know you have some other options, you are not yet impoverished. We can help these individuals by listening to them and working on their strengths, instead of their weaknesses.

Theses are just two of the many ways to try and help out homeless people. There exist others but to go through each and every one of them would involve a whole different paper. Instead of seeing these people as a problem to be solved, I believe everyone should do their part in helping out homelessness. In doing my research I learned many interesting concepts about homelessness that I was not aware of. Most homeless people do not have a choice to become homeless; it is a situation that arises in their lives that can not be stopped.



In most cases it is a matter of cost of housing versus take home pay or financial set backs that people have. Although there are many federal government aids, the homeless population is too vast for their help. The choice is yours whether to get out of the slump that you are in or stay the way that you are, miserable and lonely. If you wish to help out the homeless you can do so by volunteering at soup kitchens, shelters or hospitals. Try not to judge them by the way they look, instead observe and listen to what they have to say and learn from it. Works Cited 1.

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