

Homelessness in america analysis essay



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Homelessness can be defined as the situation where an individual lacks a permanent, regular and humane-comfortable nighttime residence.

Additionally, homelessness refers to the scenario where a person's primary basic nighttime residence is; a supervised shelter, either publicly or privately owned, that provide temporary accommodation, an institution providing temporary accommodation or a place not designed for the purposes of regular accommodation and sleeping for human beings such as vehicles (Department of Housing and Urban Development). This paper analyses the issue of homelessness in the USA. The statistics used are based on the 2011 National Alliance to end Homelessness report on the state of homelessness in the USA. Vital StatisticsIn their latest report, it is revealed that there are about 656, 129 homeless individuals in the US at any night. Therefore, for every 10000 citizens, about 21 of them have no homes. Out of all this population, 412, 973 of them are individuals while the rest, 243, 156, are people in families. The most disturbing fact is that the figure represents a 3% increase from the one in 2008 (this report uses the 2009 statistics). 403, 308 of the homeless population are residing in shelters or temporary housing units. About two-fifths of the homeless were living in the streets or places not ideal for human habitation. Chronic homelessness is the case where persons with disabilities, mental illnesses, addicted to hard drugs, substance abuse, serious medical conditions have no homes of their own. It can also refer to individuals who are homelessness almost all the time or for a painfully long time. In 2009, there were about 112, 076 chronic homeless persons, an increase of 753 from the year 2008. This implies that about 27% of the total homeless population is in the chronic category. From the figures, it is clear that homelessness in America is rising and measures have to be

taken to arrest the situation. But what are the causes of homelessness?

Causes One of the main causes of homelessness is poverty. This section of the society faces real economic challenges in obtaining and maintaining a household. In the US, housing is said to be affordable if it accounts for 30% (or lower) of the total income in a given household. The average for the renters is about 40%. This suggests that the poor will spend a larger portion of their income on housing: rent. Severe housing cost burden arises when a household spends more than 50% of its total income on rent. In the year 2009, it was estimated that 72% of the poor face severe housing cost burden. Houses in this situation are in greater risk of becoming homeless. In states such as Florida, California and Nevada, about 80% of the people living below the poverty line face severe housing cost burden. The threat of this households becoming homeless is real. Some families may be facing severe housing cost burden due to low income levels; some may just find the cost of housing too expensive for them. In such a case, they are forced into homelessness. This may be due to lack of employment or loss of job. In the year 2009, the rate of unemployment was at a very high 9.3%. This simply meant that some families lost their homes as they could not afford the rent. The highest unemployment rate was recorded in Michigan. Additionally, other people cannot afford decent housing simply because they earn meager wages. In 2009, a worker from poor households on average earned about \$9,151 per year. This simply means that if this worker is the sole breadwinner of the household, he/she would need an affordable house that is less than about \$230 per month. However, in all the counties in the US, fair market rents for one bedroom apartment are more than this \$230. This in essence means that such persons are more or less condemned into homelessness.

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The US has been experiencing a foreclosure crisis. While most of the people that face foreclosure find alternative places, some of them are thrown into homelessness. Foreclosure rose by about 500000 in 2009 as compared to the figures in 2008. In states such as Alabama, West Virginia, Mississippi, Hawaii and Idaho the number of foreclosed units rose almost three times. This in effect means that some people and families became homeless. Homelessness can also be caused when families double up but their economic situation does not improve. Doubling up arises when people are forced to live with friends and families as a result of financial difficulty. It is estimated that about one person out of ten will become homeless when he/she doubles up. In 2009, the total number of people who had doubled up was 6, 037, 256. Another group of people prone to homelessness are those just discharged from prison. It is estimated that one out of eleven released prisoners will become homeless. Well, there were 679, 738 prison releases in 2009, a 2% increase from 2008. Lastly, youths who age out of foster care are at an elevated risk of becoming homeless. In this category, a sixth of such young adults have a higher chance of becoming homeless. That same year, foster care emancipations were 29, 500 youths. Lastly, domestic violence can lead to homelessness. This mostly affects women who opt out of abusive relationships yet have low incomes. In 2005, it was estimated that about half the cases of homelessness are caused by domestic violence. About 63% of the homeless women were abused at their former homes (National Coalition of the Homeless, 2009). From the above analysis, it is clear that this problem is on the rise. Therefore, policies have to be put place to arrest the situation before it goes out of hand. The next section suggests some of the measures that can be applied to tackle the situation. Tackling

Homelessness One of the main causes for homelessness, actually the main cause, is poverty. Tackling poverty in essence means tackling homelessness. The rate of unemployment has been rising for the past few years. Therefore, the government has to come up with programs that will prevent a further increase in this level. This may be by encouraging entrepreneurship among the youth and the unemployed. This can be done by providing them with funds for investments. The government should also avail a conducive economic environment such that there will be no further loss of jobs as companies tend to cut jobs as a means cost reduction when they incur losses due to bad economic situations. The government should also spend more on programs that will create and maintain cheap housing facilities so that many people can afford them (Hill, 2010). The government can also engage actively and directly in ensuring that individuals and families find permanent housing. This can be done by providing financial assistance for them to acquire the housing facilities. It can also provide rents in the short term as the individuals find their footing. The government should then strive to remove the barriers that hinder long term housing stability. The government should also legislate against unchecked demolition of public houses. This can be done in such a way that before a housing facility is brought down, there is an almost similar one in place. This will ensure that the people affected with the demolition have a similar, available and ready alternative. This demolition has been rampant in Atlanta where subsidized houses are continuously brought down to pave way for mixed-income houses. The affected families are always given no alternative (Hill, 2010). Domestic violence has led to many people opting out of their homes. Therefore, the government should educate the whole population against the practice. It

should also prosecute the perpetrators to discourage the people from committing the crime and also mete out harsher punishments. This may help in reducing the occurrence of domestic violence and hence homelessness. The government can also embark on providing affordable housing to the people in risk of becoming homeless like the low income earners, youth and unemployed. It can also ensure that all citizens have both housing and health insurance so that they have easy access to both. The government should also encourage families to stick together at all times. Lastly, the states should always be in coordination with schools and community organizations that have the ability to identify the children and youth who are homeless or are vulnerable to become one. This will help in preventing the situation from arising (Opening Doors, 2010).

It is everyone's dream to have a permanent and comfortable place of residence. The benefits accrued from having a home are numerous; many diseases are kept at bay, violence and crime are reduced, morality is upheld. The government has also acknowledged the benefits. In its strategic plan 'Opening Doors' of 2010, it revealed that a year after homeless persons were entered into support housing programs in Portland there was a 77% reduction in inpatient hospitalization, 62% decrease in emergency room visits, 60% fewer ambulance transports, almost 40% reduction in psychiatric hospitalizations, days in jail reduced by 62% and lastly, 68% fewer police contacts. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is everything to gain when homelessness is eliminated.