

Example of homelessness in the usa research paper

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Introduction

Along with health- and welfare-related rights, the right to housing is one of crucial human rights. Thus homelessness represents an important human rights and social concern. According to the definition by the UN Economic Commission for Europe Conference of European Statisticians, homelessness can be viewed either as primary state (rooflessness or the case of persons, living in the streets) or a secondary one (the case of persons with no place of usual residence, who often move between different types of temporary accommodation) (UN Economic and Social Council 3). In the US homelessness is viewed in broader terms. According to the legal definition of homelessness, it encompasses such notions as current homelessness; imminent homelessness; youth or family instability, caused by hardship and home instability, caused by domestic violence (Legal Information Institute 1). Sociological analysis of homelessness issue in the USA requires a detailed analysis of the scope of the issue under study, the sources of information that are used to acquire basic understanding of homelessness as a social problem, as well as claim-makers and claim-making process.

Homelessness as a social problem

As it was mentioned above, in the US homelessness is considered in several dimensions. Current homelessness includes such categories as homelessness without shelter; homelessness with a shelter (supervised publicly or privately founded shelter) and homelessness, called forth by the institutional release. The acknowledgment of the imminent homelessness requires fulfillment of such conditions as the imminence of loss of a shelter;

the lack of alternative housing and support.

The criteria of youth or family home instability, caused by hardship, include a qualification of persons as either youth or a family; the lack of permanent housing, persistent nature of the housing-related instability, as well as the presence of chronic hardship. It is interesting to note that hardship needs to be proved by the presence of one of six factors. They are chronic disabilities, chronic physical or mental health disorders, addiction to substances, the history of domestic violence incidents and/or child abuse (including neglect), the presence of a child or a young person with disability, as well as the presence of barriers to unemployment. Typical unemployment-related barriers include the lack of high school diploma, illiteracy, low English proficiency, previous detention or incarceration for criminal activities and the experience of unstable employment.

The last category of homelessness includes home instability that is caused by domestic violence. The conditions for the acknowledgment of this type of homelessness include the flight from violence (e. g., domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking etc.), connection of the flight with housing-related issues, the lack of alternative housing, as well as the lack of support (Department of Housing and Urban Development 7599-76018).

The analysis of the legal definition of homelessness brings one to the understanding of the homelessness close links with various social problems that include protection of the vulnerable groups (e. g., women, children, people with disabilities, recent detainees), education (providing everybody with the opportunity to get high school diploma), integration of migrants, domestic violence and different types of addictions. Social imagination

perspective lets one state that homeless people are ostracized from the people of higher socio-economic strata. Furthermore, they are deprived of networks and interactions with the representatives of other socio-economic classes. Apart from being caused by social problems (e. g., unemployment, the lack of support), homelessness is capable of determining forthcoming social problems. For instance, it is evident that the employers are reluctant to hire people, who do not have the place of permanent residence. As problems tend to interrelate and depend on one another, homelessness leads people to becoming disadvantaged and marginalized.

The application of sociological imagination method allows establishing the link between what can be seen as private troubles of specific people and social issues that are caused by macro-level phenomena. Furthermore, different sociological perspectives can provide on with an opportunity to experience totally different approaches to the issue of homelessness and the ways to tackle it.

Functionalists consider society as the combination of parts that make up a whole. They consider major social institutes (e. g., government, family, the economy, school system) to be purely functional and aimed at ensuring the wellbeing of society as a whole. So, it is logical to suggest that the adherents of this theory are likely to view homelessness as the problem of the individual. A more creative idea is that functionalists may claim that as any social phenomenon, homelessness plays a particular role in the society. For instance, it may be claimed that homelessness is the issue that testifies to the presence of a dysfunction in the social system, so that the need to improve the functioning of its particular segments can be apparently

watched.

Conflict theory of sociology is emphasizing the role of coercion and power in society. This theory sees society as a combination of social groups that compete for socio-economic resources. Under these circumstances social order is maintained by domination of one group upon the others. The representatives of conflict theory school of sociology would claim that homelessness is the indicator of the improper balance of powers in society. In their view, while the small group of elite maintains control over socio-economic resources, the others become marginalized, suffering from a range of social problems, including poverty and homelessness. They are likely to suggest that one of the reasons for the appearance of the homelessness issue is the wrongful design of social welfare system that is unable to meet the needs of most disadvantaged groups.

Feminist theory is often viewed as the extension of feminist movement into political, sociological and philosophical discourse. Feminist theory pays particular attention to understanding the social roots of gender inequality and researching into the social roles of women. The feminist theory adherents can observe homelessness as one of the issues that women can face in society. The representatives of the feminist theory are likely to dedicate most significant amount of efforts to exploring the links between gender and homelessness, as well as the links between homelessness and domestic violence.

Macrosociology is one of the approaches to sociology that emphasizes the importance of studying social systems at the high level of theoretical abstraction. Macro theory is likely to consider homelessness the indicator of

the malfunction of social structure and the need of macro interventions. The theory considers homelessness beyond the level of one individual, and can be viewed as contrary to the functional theory that suggests considering homelessness as the micro-issue.

Studying of the homelessness phenomenon from different perspectives can be beneficial for elaborating on different-level prevention and intervention strategies.

The information concerning homelessness

Effective studying of homelessness phenomenon with the application of different sociological approaches requires analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. Most current statistics regarding the state of homelessness in the USA are available at the website of the National Alliance to End Homelessness. According to the findings, summarized in the most recent report of the organization, over the period from 2011 to 2013 the homeless population of the USA has decreased by 0.4 per cent, and in 2012 633,782 persons in the USA were experiencing homelessness. The most significant decrease was reported among the individuals, identified as chronically homeless and the veterans (Alliance to End Homelessness 1).

Apart from statistics concerning the phenomenon of homelessness, the research can be supplemented by statistical data, concerning such issues as economic and housing factors, demographic and household data, as well as the data concerning domestic violence, unemployment, disabilities and other risk factors. Demographic and households data are available at the website of the U. S. Census Bureau. Among these data it is worth singling out such categories as children, equal employment opportunity tabulation, families

and living arrangements, health insurance, housing, labour force, poverty and wellbeing. Relevant statistics, produced with the help of other categorization methods, can be found at wide variety of governmental websites and the electronic resources of NGOs.

Qualitative data also plays an important role in homelessness-related research. The qualitative data helps to get a better understanding of the needs of a particular group and design intervention strategies, capable of meeting these needs. The template for the interview of a homeless woman, developed by U. B. Jani, included the questions concerning the duration of homelessness state, the circumstances that caused homelessness, most difficult homelessness-related challenges, the services the people were getting and the influence homelessness exerted on the families of the women (112). The good example of utilizing qualitative data regarding homelessness is provided in the study by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs of Ireland. The authors of the study used qualitative data in order to research into young people's pathways to homelessness, the process of entering the world of the homeless, as well as the transfer from youth to adult homelessness. As a result of the study, the key policy-related messages concerning housing and support options for young people, support of the transition to the independent living, sustaining housing and the gender and the homeless pathways of young people (Department of Children and Youth Affairs of Ireland 66-67).

Claim makers and claim-making process

The claim-makers are people, who assert that the social problem exists and needs attention of the policymakers. A claim that is made with respect to a <https://assignbuster.com/example-of-homelessness-in-the-usa-research-paper/>

social problem is closely interconnected with a morally-and legally-legitimated right that needs to be recognized, created, implemented or protected. The claim-makers, whose claims concern the issue of homelessness, are represented by wide variety of non-governmental organizations that aim at providing social services and protecting human rights. Among the organizations that view combating homelessness a key direction of activities it is worth mentioning “ Helping America’s Homeless” and “ Alliance to End Homelessness”. Significant role in representing the interests of the homeless in the USA is played by governmental institutions, such as the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The Department had created the range of initiatives to prevent and combat homelessness, namely Homelessness Data Exchange, Homelessness Resource Center and Homelessness Resource Exchange. The situations that appear to be at the crossroads of homelessness and other social issues include the U. S. Department for Health and Social Services and U. S. Social Security Administration. Recently the U. S. government has created specific agency, aimed at preventing and combating homelessness that is called the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness.

The claims that are made by government- and non-governmental agencies can take different forms. While governmental agencies concentrate on elaborating on specific prevention and intervention programs related to homelessness, non-governmental agencies use various means to influence the policies and approaches, used by governmental agencies. Pursuing this aim, they may collect data, conduct research, produce recommendations, file petitions and use lawful means to participate in decision-making and

policymaking processes. Furthermore, public and private entities may apply joint efforts to tackle the issue. For instance, public-private partnership mechanism can be used to elaborate on and implement projects in the sphere under study. As the homeless represent highly disadvantaged and marginalized social group, the representatives of the group are not likely to participate in claim-making process. However, they are consulted at the stage of pre-claim data collection. The claim-making process concerns not only promoting specific prevention and intervention strategies, tackling the issue under study, but raising public awareness about homelessness as a social problem among different socio-economic groups.

Conclusion

Homelessness is an important social and human rights issue in the United States. It can be considered from the points of view of various sociological theories. The peculiarity of the issue lies in the fact that can be considered both at the level of a personal story of a homeless individual and at the macrolevel. Both quantitative and qualitative data play an important role in effective research concerning homelessness issue. The prevention and intervention measures are elaborated on both by private and public entities.

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