

Ntic students
perceptions of
homeless people
psychology essay



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Homeless is a serious problem that society has not eliminated and history shows that at times of economic difficulty the situation of homelessness becomes worse. Across Europe more people have become homeless and are excluded from society. Research indicates that society's perception of homeless people can affect how much help they receive. This research undertook to investigate attitudes among a Nottingham Trent International College students'. A survey was conducted using a questionnaire data collection method in order to answer the research goals of this project. A total of 25 students were invited to participate in the research. The key objectives of the study were to determine NTIC student attitudes towards homeless and understand how important homelessness was perceived to be and what measures if any were supported. The results of questionnaire showed that students had a positive attitude of homeless people. The perception was that homeless were responsible for their situation but that there were other factors. There was not significant support for measures to support the homeless and it was considered to less important other issues including education, crime and health.

Introduction

Homeless is a problem around the world and what people think about homeless people can affect the help and support they may receive from society and government. Around the world governments are cutting back on services and one of the areas that is affected is the service to support the homeless. In the UK there is much discussion about the reduced spending on public services and money for homeless services is one area will be affected. It is significant to consider how far public attitude can affect the support

given to homeless people. In America homeless services are being cut-back because this is an area which the government does not have to worry about the public's opinion (Abramsky 2010). This is because the public are not concerned about homelessness and in fact actually see it as an annoyance or a waste of money.

Homelessness is a serious problem for many people who suffering from health problems both physical and mental. History has showing that in economic bad times homelessness became very bad such as in the Victorian period and in the 1980s (Abramsky 2010). In the current poor economic situation with the government cutting back on public spending in all areas it is important to raise the question will support for homeless people become less. How much support they receive will depend on how strong attitudes are for the homeless.

Therefore this research will investigate the current attitude of students at NTIC to give indication of wider perception of the UK Public attitude on the issue. The results from the survey will provide an indication of whether public think that homeless is a serious issue that support strong action by government and society. Additionally it will indicate whether student perceive the action in Nottingham is too little or too much and whether attitude will encourage action or allow homeless to become worse.

A survey was conducted using a questionnaire data collection method in order to answer the research goals of this project. The results of the survey focused on answering several research questions:

How do you think people become homeless?

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Where do you think homeless get food and money?

How can homeless people be helped?

Do you think homeless people are responsible for their situation?

Do you think homelessness is a serious problem in the UK?

Do you think homelessness should be a priority for the government?

What measures to help homeless people do you support?

Literature Review

Numerous studies have focused on the attitudes of different groups toward the homeless. Many of these studies have focused on the attitudes of medical students and nurses. Kee Minick and Connor (1999) found that overall the attitudes of nurses towards the homeless were not negative.

Nurses' perceptions were that homelessness was due to a lack of jobs. Kee, Minick and Connor (1999) suggest this as a likely reason why their view was positive. Furthermore, the study showed that Nurses unlike the general public, believed that mental illness was important cause for homelessness.

Nurse students also perceived that the homeless were not always able to get access to the medical support they needed (Hunter et al. 1991 cited in Cruz, Brehm & Harris 2004). One negative perception that this group did have was that the homeless, that suffered from drink or drug problems, did not need as much care other people.

In some cases nurses' views were not different from other people. An earlier study showed that the general public had similar views as nurses about the cause of homeless. Lee, Jones and Lewis (1990) discovered that the Public in America had the attitude that homelessness was the result of environmental factors such as poor job opportunities or education facilities. Personal factors such as motivation, ability and effort were seen as less significant.

Nevertheless Lee, Jones and Lewis (1990) point to evidence by an Associated Press survey in 1989, that a large percentage 42% of the public consider the individual is at fault for their situation.

Other studies found that attitudes could actually change in certain environments. Mason and Lester (2003) revealed that medical students were very likely to develop negatives views of the homeless throughout their period of study.

In contrast, the study by Cruz, Brehm and Harris (2004) measured attitudes of primary care residents over a period and discovered that perception towards homelessness could be influenced in a positive way by educating participants about the homeless.

Meanwhile some research showed that positive views could be determined by the student's background. Perry (2003) examined students' attitudes in relation to their views on working with homeless people. Their research showed that an interest or willingness to work with homeless people was shown by older students that had experience of long-term relations.

Moreover students that had more liberal political views had a more positive attitude and aspiration of working with homeless people compared to those

with more conservative political views. A study by Tor and McDonnell (1992) revealed similar results. For example young people and women may have a sympathetic attitude toward the homeless, while in contrast white people or people with conservative political views would place the blame on the homeless person (Tor and McDonnell 1992).

The literature on the attitudes towards the homeless also covers the views of the general public. Toro et al. (2007) found that society had a less sympathetic attitude of homeless people in English-speaking nations where there was not unequal spread of wealth. Such countries had less helpful and supportive measures to reduce homelessness. Homelessness was not viewed as the fault of the individual (Lee, Jones and Lewis (1990).

A generally positive attitude by Americans was also discovered in national study by Tompsett et al. (2006). The wider public held less stereotypical views of homeless than in the past and they approved of measures to help the homeless, which they did not consider a serious issue. Overall the Americans were found to have a more compassionate attitude and they recognised that the cause of homelessness related to more personal and social issues that were not connected with external factors like the economy Tompsett et al. (2006).

According to Kee, Minick and Connor (1999) an understanding of the public and particular groups perceptions of the homeless is significant to design educational and information initiatives that can influence how the homeless are supported. Such views according to Lee, Jones and Lewis (1990) can

have a large influence on the development of government policy on the homeless.

In existing research reviewed there was little study on the attitudes of mainstream students groups which go onto to play roles as managers in industry or policy makers in public organisations. Therefore this study provides a basis for assessing attitudes of mainstream students in the UK.

In regards to methodology adopted by such studies, the questionnaire method is widely used. Mason and Lester (2003) used a questionnaire approach which was based on Likert scale of 1-5 for twenty questions to survey students' attitudes. Their study was based on questionnaire designed and validated with the main purpose of measuring students' attitudes to homeless people.

Methodology

This research implemented a questionnaire data collection method in order to answer the research goals of this project. A total of 30 students were invited to participate in the research.

Male and female students were selected at using convenience sampling method from the central refreshment area of the Nottingham Trent International College. This selection method proved to be the simplest, quickest and less costly way to access students that were ready and available to participate in the research.

The research design was focused on students' attitudes on the homeless and aims to identify students' perceptions of the homeless and whether they are in favour further action to support homeless people.

A short questionnaire was designed with 12 questions (see Appendix 1) to capture students' response to a number of statements using a Likert scale. Due to the time restriction for this study closed questions were selected because they were easier and quicker to complete and analyse. Student simply selected from 5 options that matched their view ranging from ' Strongly Agree' to ' Strongly Disagree'. This was advantage because it would be easier to collect views from students coming from abroad.

The questionnaire grouped the questions into topics to make it easier to follow and understand. All questions were connected with the research aims and objectives. The three questions collected personal information such as age, sex and nationality. Six questions were included to focus on students' perception of homeless people and to provide indication of sympathy. These questions examined whether students' viewed homeless people as rude, aggressive, victims and responsible for their actions. One question dealt with the perceived causes of homelessness while questions four questions were included to address research objectives concerned with students' attitudes on the seriousness of homelessness, government action and types of action that should be implemented.

The validity of the questionnaire was important factor to think about.

Content validity was assessed by referring to the literature review and making questions in the questionnaire was connected to topics and ideas for

the existing studies. Also a technique known as face validation was used, which means that common sense was used to judge that the questions and wordings in the questionnaire made sense for this topic. Furthermore, the ideas for the sentences and the wording for the questionnaire were based on ideas and statements used in existing studies.

The first draft of the questionnaire was tested with two student colleagues to identify and correct any errors and improve the design. In this first draft several problems and mistakes were found. Firstly, in some questions there were mistakes in the options which create confusion and delay. Secondly, there were English grammar mistakes so the question was not clear. These were corrected and the questionnaire was tested a second time. There was a comment that there was not helpful instruction at the beginning of the questionnaire and the questions were too close together that it was causing confusion. The second version had clear instructions and more spacing to ensure a high chance of completion.

Students were approached outside the main entrance of the university and invited to participate in the research. The purpose of the research was explained and students were informed that all data collected would be anonymous and confidential. Initially the aim was to collect email addresses and email the questionnaires for students to complete and return. However, from ten students none replied within 24hrs. A different approach was taken when students were asked for 5 mins of their time to complete the questionnaire immediately. A total of 34 questionnaires were collected over three days. Four of the questionnaires were only partially completed and were not included in the analysis.

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One major problem was that international students had more difficult understanding all questions. It was not possible to know whether they really understood the question and answered according to their view or not. In addition, it seem that some students were ticking the answers very fast indicating that possibly they were not thinking fully about the question. Due to the same scale for every question this made it easier for them not to concentrate and follow pattern of ticking.

Findings and Discussion

This findings from this study in a small degree provides an understanding of the attitudes of students that has not been covered in existing research.

Thirty questionnaires were successfully completed and returned. The student breakdown was 17 male and 13 female of the following nationalities: 3 Nigerian, 2 Pakistani, 7 Chinese and 18 other nationalities including Arabs.

The research goal of identifying how sympathetic students were of homeless people are covered by statements in Figure1. Students attitude to homeless people in general was found to more positive than negative. As indicated by Figure 1. 50% of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that homeless people were responsible for their situation. These finding can be linked with evidence from Lee, Jones and Lewis (1990) that show a large percentage (42%) of the public consider the individual is at fault for their situation. Only 20% of NTIC students disagreed that the homeless were responsible for their situation statement. Initially this appears that students blaming homeless for their situation and have negative attitude, however there is evidence that this is not the case. For instance

more than two thirds of respondents stated that they either strongly agree or
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disagree to the statement that 'homeless people do not choose to be homeless'. A reasonable conclusion is that students understood that homeless do not select to homeless but at the same time they are responsible for what happen to them. This is supported by the finding that the majority of students questioned believed that homeless people were victims. Two third agree with this statement and over one sixth give a neutral response.

In terms of the behaviour of homeless people the view of students the results show that there is overall there divided views on whether homeless people are aggressive. However there is strong attitude that homeles people are not really rude. The majority of students stated they had neutral view or disagree with the statement that homeless people ware rude.

The overall attitude towards homeless by these students correspond to student nurse attitudes studied by Kee Minick and Connor (1999) that finding that homeless peoples attitudes towards homeless people are generally not negative.

Figure . Student Attitude Towards Homeless People

Figure . Causes of Homelessness

The findings in Figure 2. address the research question on what students believe are the possible causes for homelessness. The results show that students believe homeless is caused mainly by alcholol or financial problems. There was strong viewpoint that financial problems is the main cause for homeless with two thirds of students strongly agree or agree to this view. This finding is in the same direction as research by Kee, Minick and

Connor (1999) who found that nurses believed environmental factors was a cause of homelessness. Another study by Lee, Jones and Lewis (1990) agree with the finding of this research, which found that American public believed that homeless was caused poor job opportunities. This situation can lead to financial problems.

In addition the survey showed that under one third of students viewed that homelessness could be caused by health problems. This finding is in the same direction as Kee, Minick and Connor (1999) which found that nurses believed mental illness was the main cause of homelessness.

Table . Attitudes on measure to deal with homelessness

Table 1. details the findings answering the research goal on how students believe how homeless people should be helped. Students demonstrated strong views on this topic with a large number of respondents either agreeing or disagreeing with the options listed. Fifty seven percent of student agreed that homeless people could be helped by providing more housing and increasing funding for prevention measures. There was balance opinion on increasing funding to charities, while a majority 77% of students did not agree that homeless could be helped by counselling. There was little agreement for creating special job programmes to deal with homelessness with 77% of students either netural or disagreeing.

Table . Importance of Homelessness other factors

An interesting finding from this research is that students have very strong view on how important homeless is compared to other issues. The majority

of students had the attitude that homeless was less important than healthcare (80%), education (70%), crime (80%) and unemployment (63%). Students were either uncertain or disagreed that homeless was less important than youth work. It appears that these social issue are more important or relevant for students than homelessness.

The question of how important homeless is considered is addressed by data in Figure 3. The finding here is that that students did not agree significantly that homeless was an important issue. An average one third of students agreed to the statements that homelessness should be either a priority for government, that it was a serious issue and that more should be done. The majority of students were uncertain on these statements with over one third of students neither agree or disagree that it should be a priority.

The above findings are supported by Tompsett et al. (2006) which also found that wider public approved of measures to help the homeless, but that they did not consider it to be a serious issue.

Figure . Attitude towards importance, priority and action.

The results from the questionnaire suggest that students have an overall positive attitude towards homeless. It indicates that students do understand that homeless people are not totally at fault for their situation and there are outside causes. Furthermore, they support agree to measure to build more house and increasing funding to prevent . Even so it is considered less important than other issues and not considered a serious issue that government should give higher priority to.

This last finding mean that support for the homeless could be reduced. This is because according to study by Kee, Minick and Connor (1999) public opinion can be influence on how the homeless are supported.

Conclusion

The small size of the questionnaire and the sample size limited the extent to which the research questions were answered and can be generalised. Even so the findings of the study did answer the research question of this study to some extent.

Regarding how homeless people are perceived, the questionnaire captured student attitudes on this area. It was interesting to find out that even though half of the respondents perceived homeless as responsible two thirds of respondents still believed that homeless people were victims. Here then the findings highlight a positive or sympathetic view of the homeless. It can be understood that the homeless are not considered in a negative light.

Furthermore, findings were achieved on how students perceive the homeless personality. The findings also clearly established the view that students did not view homeless people as addicts.

In the other area of questions a good understanding of student attitude towards measures and the priority of homelessness was addressed by the findings. The study showed that certain measures to help the homeless should not be considered. The study highlighted those measures that students thought were most important including more housing and increasing funding for prevention measures. The findings addressed the questions of whether more should be to help the homeless, whether it should

be a government priority and whether students considered homelessness a serious issue. The study provided confirmation that this issue was not considered a priority and highlighted the attitude that homeless was not as serious as many other issues including health, education and crime.

Another focus of this study was addressed by the findings. There was clear indication that students viewed financial problems and alcohol as the two main causes of homelessness.

The main limitation of this research is that the students at NTIC do not represent the whole of society and also it is a very small sample. It will only provide perception of part of society that can afford to go to college or only young people. The section of society that are not educated or higher age will not be representing in this survey. The survey may only be completed by people that have strong opinion of homeless people.

Some improvements can be made to existing research. Firstly, the size of sample for the survey should be increase to a higher number. Secondly, the questionnaire can be test twice to check its reliability. The questionnaire could also adopt questions from other studies where the validity is checked and is strong.

Further research could be undertaken to study the attitudes of student after they experience face-face account of homeless person experience. It would also be useful to undertake study stereotypes of homeless and measuring to what extent students believed a number of stereotypes on homeless to identify extent of misperceptions.