

Homelessness in
america
argumentative essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Each country in the world is faced with various social issues that attract the interest of numerous stakeholders. And when society is faced with such social issues the general citizenry come together and try to resolve whatever issue is at hand. In certain social issue society generally feel like it is their responsibility to assist certain population of the citizens that has been determined as needy however they has been some social problems that have been existence in America that have not been fully or never completely resolved. The number of people that are being pushed on the streets for various reasons has been steadily increasing.

Homelessness has been a long time America's social problem. The word homelessness has been in use in America for about 150 years. Nevertheless there has been no clear cut generally accepted definition for homelessness. There have been many different definitions with characteristically criteria used by the various interest groups in trying to serve or screen and decide who to provide support for. Arnold points out that " The literature about homelessness can be summed up under the two broad categories: of conservative or progressive interpretations" (116). The vagrancy law and the modern anti-homeless policies strive to end this long lasting social challenge.

The desire for control and claims of peace and order are often what leads to the creation of statutes aimed at the very weak of society. Moreover most of the laws and statutes are supported by both bureaucrats and the average citizen. The need for response to the increase numbers of the homeless is what triggers the support of city ordinances to control the actions and behavior on the street. However when ordinances are enacted the analysis as Amster concludes, cities enact the ordinances to promote public safety

pedestrians congestion and public health. The consequences of the ordinances on the homeless however are it self a violation of the public safety and respect to individual personal belongings (145).

Homelessness is a social challenge that requires the identification of who is homeless; implementation of public policy and changes in the public perception of the homeless people. There are numerous causes of homelessness and particularly there an ever increasing group of the population that is facing the problem. The social welfare of women and children living on the street is of much concern; they are very vulnerable to many dangers of living on the street. This category of the homeless is subject to various forms of abuse physical and sexual. William states that the poverty level these women endure is what leads to the crisis. The trend is irreversible and they will continue to be the ever growing percentage of the homeless population (13).

Moreover there are other various scenarios that drive women to enter the homeless and battered women's shelters. It takes a long time for a woman to enter a shelter; it is after the build up of these causes that a woman decides to enter an institution. William further discusses domestic violence as a cause of homelessness in women. Domestic violence has been associated with causing homelessness among American women. These women seek shelters for physical protection. These women moreover hide from their abusive partners for fear of continued abuse if their partners know where they are living.

Case workers understand that domestic violence takes in the form of physical, emotional, verbal and sexual abuse. The refusal by battered women to visit or be associated with their abusive partners is proof that these women require physical protection. Women have been subjected to abuse from spouses, boyfriends, parents and other relatives. Women that seek emergency shelters have usually been battered and more likely to come from poor or poverty stricken homes.

It is in deed saddening to note that most of the homeless studies have failed to resolve the role of domestic violence in women's homelessness (20).

William in his interpretation of a battered woman he explains that a battered woman is identified as a woman who is passive confused, lack of independence who has suffered emotional disorders (11). However there have been cases where a homeless woman exhibits angry and combative behavior. This is often interpreted as a defensive tactic that these venerable women employ.

The behavior is actually dropped once these women enter the shelter and find the shelter community to be supportive to them and often feel the sense of security around them (136). In the words of William " The creation of the battered woman ideal type takes place in shelter systems that primarily employ professional social workers. During the 1980s many battered women's shelters under went a process of professionalization. " " By the 1990s most shelters had revamped their programs or staffing to conform to the demands of funding sources by centralizing authority emphasizing employee's formal credentials, and insinuating therapeutic techniques and language into daily interaction between the staff and battered women"

<https://assignbuster.com/homelessness-in-america-argumentative-essay/>

(152). The different services and programs offered to domestic violence and other homeless shelters are based on the different understanding of what makes up their residents' urgent needs and issues. William writes that " A woman of any age, race, social class or marital status that was in the social roles of wife and mother.

Such a woman would want to leave... but she would be trapped within her continuing and brutal victimization by the economic and emotional dependence" (153). Such a woman often feels isolated and the situation becomes even more challenging when these women are refused to be assisted by friends and social workers. Her emotions become affected and often are un-stable this type of a woman tend to have very low self esteem. As William explains the programs designed for battered women are totally different from the programs other homeless women are enrolled into.

Battered women shelters tend to focus on counseling and emotional support, while the homeless woman's focus is economic stability. Williams explains the identity of a battered woman as " The battered woman's identities are delimited by a range of experiences characteristic that do not necessarily match women's lives" (152). The institution offering services for the battered women often establish criteria to use when selecting which women can enter the institution. The scenario provides or creates another type of homeless women - the unbattered women.

These women struggle to get a shelter to accept them because of the staff member's beliefs that each woman should conform either to the battered women class or other homeless women class. This policy in a way does not

promote the free flow of information as most women start to make some twists to their abused and battered personal experiences in order to get the sympathy of the shelter system and get admitted. William writes that “ Of course, it is not merely individual staff members or shelters that characterize battered and homeless women in such markedly different ways”. Many studies have revealed that battered women tend to receive more sympathy than the other class of the homeless women. They tend to get much more generous resources and are less confined by less negative judgments about deservingness (152).

The most interesting thing is the fact that even though these women are classified differently the experiences associated with both classes is that the stories of these women have very little difference. They are all more likely to have come from low income and persistently poor families. Women’s accounts and comments have repeatedly revealed the relationship between domestic violence in understanding homelessness in women. Battered women who have been victims of violence require emotional reconstruction and this is why they tend to receive services and program specifically designed for them.

As the society faces break down in the marriage and other family relationship more than just women suffer. There is another even more at risk category of the homeless— the children. Homeless children are categorized as the children of the homeless parents or children that are on the street with out adult supervision. When children find themselves on the street as Karabanow points out it is often that they are escaping from problematic situations. It could be dysfunctional family or negative child welfare

encounters, abuse which could be both of the forms physical, sexual or emotional and abject poverty.

Once the children are faced with such tough situations they tend to think that the street provides a safe haven for them (4). Children of the homeless parents are always easily identified than any other group of homeless children. Criswell adds that these children are more likely to come from a single mother family and the mother is more likely to be in her twenties and likely to have dropped out of high school and she is more likely to have grown up in a foster care home (59). The children of the homeless women find themselves homeless when their mothers either become homeless due to various reasons or become a domestic violence victims taking with them children when they run away from the abusive partners.

Although not all homeless children are coming from abusive cases not all children that become homeless are running away from abusive parents or guardians; homeless children are more likely to be abused and neglected than housed children. They exhibit a sense of hopelessness that is brought about when they become homeless. On the other hand exist the unaccompanied youth who are wandering the streets. These youths have to fend for themselves and have no positive adult social influence and supervision. Criswell in his writing reports that “ The U. S.

conference of Mayors estimated in 1995 that “ unaccompanied youth” represented 3.5 percent of the homeless population in America’s twenty—nine major cities. ” The report revealed the statistical increase among this population to be only 3 percent in 1990. Criswell observes that “ As a result

of the destruction cycle in which homeless children live, they suffer physical, emotional, socially, and developmentally effects” (61). Criswell refers to the research conducted by Dr.

Ellen Bassuk of Harvard Medical School who observed that homeless preschoolers display a wide range of serious emotional, social and cognitive problems. In his explanation Criswell states that “ After children arrive in shelters they exhibit more behavioral problems than housed children. Homeless preschoolers observed in New York day-care centers showed regressive behaviors, lack of inhibitions with strangers, and immature relationships with peers, increased hyperactive behaviors’ seemed to be a way to cope with a cramped environment” (61). Moreover the environment they live in is related to how they become shaped as citizens and their health well-being is of great concern.

Un- housed children have been subjects of chronicle health problems. Criswell points out in his reference to finding by the American Journal “ According to the American Journal of public health homeless children are as twice as likely as children in general to experience chronic health problems. The records of immunization of homeless children are often in-complete and sometimes missing” (64). Due to the poor living conditions and the constant environmental exposure homeless children are more vulnerable to illness such as respiratory and ear infections, gastrointestinal problems and lice infections. Criswell reveals that “ Homeless children tested in New York City had higher blood concentrations of lead than did housed children who live in poverty” (65). The life on the street is a major challenge to them as they face numerous other difficulties.

Another growing population that is facing the homeless problems is the returned war veterans. Baumohl makes the case for the consequences of the U. S. military action engagement. There has always been some public concern about the welfare of the veterans. Most veterans are at a higher risk of becoming homeless.

The concern date as far back as the 12th century when the first hospital to cater for injured veterans; returning from the holy land were establish. In the 16th century the first veteran's home was built to accommodate English sailors that were living Vega bond lives after they had been too long at sea. This background information provides cues as to how far back the problem of the veterans and the homeless veterans in particular been in existence.

Despite the fact that the problems of homelessness among the veterans has been around for a long time it was hard for many people to understand why since the 1980s there has been an increasing number of veterans becoming homeless. Veterans of the World War II have generally been offered a variety of benefits and generally good pay, there are also better educated compared to other citizens in the same age group. It is therefore the reason for the anticipation that veterans would be much less vulnerable to homelessness in comparison with other American that are likely to become homeless.

Most veterans vulnerable because they suffer prolonged psychological disorders related to their military experience during war. These veterans often have post—traumatic disorders which leads to them falling victims of the homeless phenomena. Baumohl reference to the 1987 finding demonstrates it ' By 1987 it was estimated that 512, 00 were homeless on an average night, out of which 200, 00 per night were determined to be

homeless veterans and the number are definitely higher today(97) Policy makers have been trying to understand what exactly causes the post—traumatic disorders among the veterans and its relation to the military service. Cunningham concludes that the problem of homelessness among war veterans is a wide spread problem that it actually affects every part of the U. S. It has been recently estimated that about 195, 827 veterans are homeless on a given night.

It has also been estimated that many more veterans—approximately 495, 4000 experience homelessness over the course of the years (5). The increasing number of veterans becoming homeless is a demonstration of the failure to some of the policies developed to serve the veterans. Baumohl reports that the proportion of homeless veterans among Americans has for the most times being estimated to be 18 percent to 51 percent. A systematic synthesis report revealed that 40 percent of the homeless men had past military exposure compared to the 34 percent of the men in the general population that have never been in military service. It has also been estimated that veterans are 1-4 times likely to become homeless in contrast to the non military population (98).

For the most part war veterans are much well off on most social economic measures, the number of war veterans that are homeless is much higher than the number of veterans in the general population. Cunningham discusses that in 2005 11 percent of the adult population was veterans but the veterans instead made up of 26 percent of the homeless population. “ The causes of homelessness among veterans are still difficult to disentangle. The same things that predict homelessness among the general population—

<https://assignbuster.com/homelessness-in-america-argumentative-essay/>

health issues, economic hardship, lack of affordable housing, access to support networks and personal characteristics also predict homelessness among war veterans.

However, veterans face additional challenges when trying to overcome these obstacles. Prolonged separation from traditional support such as family and close friends, highly stressful training and occupational demands that can affect their personality, self—esteem and ability to communicate, and the non transferability of skills to civilian jobs are among the few of the challenges” (9). Veterans that become homeless just like other homeless people are most likely to come from typically low income house brackets. It should also be noted that veterans who joined the service after 1973 in the all—volunteer force are most likely coming from poverty and low educated families and poses a much higher risk of becoming homeless (Cunningham 9). Substance abuse by many veterans is another factor that leads to homelessness.

The department of veteran’s affairs according to Cunningham estimated that “ approximately 70 percent of homeless veterans suffer from substance abuse problems with considerable overlap between mental illness and substance use disorders. Researchers also suggest that veterans are more likely to be alcohol dependence and drug abuse (98-100). Besides the alcohol and drug problems veterans also face physical health, disability and mental health problems that make them more vulnerable to becoming homeless. As a result of the injuries suffered during combat, homeless veterans have a much higher rate of bad health conditions and disabilities. “ One out of 10 veterans is disabled and may suffer from physical disabilities.

<https://assignbuster.com/homelessness-in-america-argumentative-essay/>

The number of disabled veterans is increasing with more than 20, 000 veterans suffering from wounds in Iraq and Afghanistan” (Cunningham 10).

Cunningham further points out that mental health problem are very common among the war veterans. A report by the veteran affairs disclosed that 45 percent of homeless veterans suffer from mental illness, and many had higher post—traumatic stresses disorder rates. It is predicted by recent studies that Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans may have to cope with high chances of becoming homeless due to mental health related problems. The report reveals that “ 19 percent of Iraq veterans reported a mental health problem, compared with 11.

3 percent for those returning from Afghanistan. It appears that combat exposure is an important factor, as rates of post—traumatic stress disorder for those returning from Iraq were almost twice the PTSD rate before deployment”(98-100). The current situation of many veterans becoming homeless should be in deed the concern of every well meaning citizen. The men and women have sacrificed for the nation and it is about time the nation gave back to them for their courageous sacrifices they made our fighting the nation’s enemies. In the words of Cunningham “ History clearly illustrates that as a nation we need to do more to protect veterans from falling through the cracks and becoming homeless. As the country struggles to resolve the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, it is important to underscore the after effects of war, to ensure that government policies are supporting troops as they return home and to do more for veterans who are already homeless.

Recently Senator Robert Menendez put it best when he said “ A grateful nation would work to ensure that the men and women who risked their lives serving their country are not left stranded when they fall on hard times back home...we should act to make sure veterans can put a roof over their head”(98—100). There has been some debate over the years about the quality and availability of health care for homeless families for many years. Unfortunately the information about the health situation and programs of homeless people was fragmented. Health programs were almost unavailable. It was only after the realization that the homeless were under served that individual community members and some local health care institutions which in themselves had very little funds started targeting homeless people and residents of single room occupancy hotels and his lead to the publication of the first modern monograph about the health care of homeless people in 1985(Jahiel 133).

Jahiel explains how the information on the health status of the homeless is obtained; the two methods of obtaining the information is by carrying out a survey of the homeless population on the street or carrying out surveys on the homeless that are receiving treatment in various institutions. The information on the population based studies has often been varied due to the wide range of definition of homelessness, site sampled, sampling methods and the size of the sampled population. Further more samples from the treatment surveys could have selection and diagnostic biases and could under estimate people that are health and do not seek health treatment when sick. This kind of clinical information usually emphasizes the present situation and usually incomplete in relation to chronic and other condition

(134). The nature of the life style lead by homeless citizens and the environment they live in is more susceptible to diseases. As such these individuals needs access to better health care however it is not easy for the homeless to have access to quality health care and often they have to face many challenges before getting the health services.

Colds, pneumonia are very prominent issues among the homeless, while anxiety disorder and paranoia is often associated with the homeless citizens with mental health problems. In the U. S. cholars, various interest groups and the government have faced challenges while trying to account for the number of Americans living on the street. The challenges stem from the difficulties encountered in trying to define who is homeless. The failure in coming up with one conclusively well accepted definition leads to the many scholars differing as who is to be counted homeless.

There have been several debates as whether people living in institutions such as shelter system, abandoned buildings and prisons and mental health centers should be counted as being homeless. The result of this on going debate has been that some homeless people have been turned away by the very institutions that are supposed to be providing support to them (Marcus 13/14). Bogard points to the fact that in the U. S. there were no official figures or research on homeless population not until the 1980; when Mary Ellen Hombs started to collect information and numbers of the homeless people which was used to estimate the number of people that needed public help as a result of being homeless(98).

The U. S. has never done a systematic approach to count the homeless nationally of people living out side the shelter system. The method that has been used to count the homeless is the combination of data from shelter counts with other sorts of local data on the frequency with which homeless individuals seek and use shelters (Jencks 8). In his writing Jencks also illustrates how social scientists come up with figures of the homeless population.

The social scientists have tried to estimate what they call the “ street-to-shelter” ratio. The most direct method often used is to look in open public places in the early hours of the morning and count the people that are found without homes sleeping out side. They then compare the numbers with the data that is available from shelters (9). A recent publication by the National Coalition for the Homeless explained that is practically impossible to account for the number of homeless people with definite accuracy due to several factors.

The publication also explains that while the knowing the number of how many people are facing homelessness is important, the report points out that the most important element of this persistent social problem is coming up with policies that ends it or making progress in ending the problem. The report demonstrates how certain individuals face homelessness as a temporary situation. It is therefore more useful to account for the size of the population that faces the problem over time instead of the number of homeless people. The difficult encountered while accounting for how many people are homeless is that some have no access to shelters and may be using other means such as family, friends, streets, cars, train stations and

<https://assignbuster.com/homelessness-in-america-argumentative-essay/>

may not be easily accounted for when the count is conducted. Street life has structure to which among many things street people will have to deal with in order to survive.

Homeless people have daily activities that they do to make a living. To be on the street could also be a matter of choice for other. Some people choose to sleep on the street; they will refuse ride offers to shelters. They opt to endure the cold night but could accept a blanket or some hot beverage. The street life has a subculture which is described as mobility, self-identity, substance use, length of time on the street, daily activities, work and other means of resourcefulness and hope.

Street subculture demands adaptation than choice. Homeless people learn to survive within the homeless environment then adapt to other issues. They are very transient moving from one place to another. Homeless people often explain why they move from place to place during the day time. They move to avoid robbery or assault with fellow street people.

They also point out to the kind of treatment they get from the police. The persistent instability among the homeless is of great concern their transient life style is a major disrupt to life and makes it difficult for them to get back on their own (38-42). Moreover the individuals would like to be identified within the homeless society. In the words of Criswell " Some long-term homeless people build an identity around self-reliance". They become resourceful as they learn to survive and do what it takes to fend for oneself on the street.

They often refer to their past and current success stories of their accomplishments and even dream about becoming self employed. Homeless people also create friendly circles among themselves for companionship and protection (45/46). The issue of identity is also related as how the homeless feel about the general population perception of them. Marcus describes how society general has failed to answer the question of who is to be regarded as homeless. Often scholars use their research guideline to determine who is homeless while the average citizen look at people with dark skinned or dirty, poor grooming, bad or inappropriate behavior and those who hangout on the street during the day to pass time as being homeless. Generally the public has a limited knowledge as to who is actually homeless.

A well dressed person with no place to live is not necessarily pointed at and is not regarded as homeless (15). The image of the homeless person has been associated with being drunk, old or that of a bag lady picking trash. This image leads to the inaccuracy in identifying who are really homeless. The public generally look at the street people as being different human beings from the rest of society.

However there are different in the sense that they are economically weak and are interdependent on social help. " Thus the general perspective of the homeless is not that they have merely fallen through the cracks; instead they are viewed as a population that is exceptional and anomalous" (Arnold 87). The belief that most homeless people choose to be so voluntary and enjoy life on the street and therefore society is not obligated to provide and care for them. Is the belief of most average Americans that unless one has mental health disorders then they should be able to work and earn a

living (Amster 151). William illustrates how the understanding of the deeper meaning of homelessness created by both homeless and housed people plays an integral part or role in determining what kind of assistance is offered to them— the homeless (2).

The challenge to resolving the problem of homelessness requires a general change in the way society, politicians and other interest group determine who is homeless who to offer assistance from whom and by who. The nature of this social problem makes the identification of the homeless difficult due to the wide varied reasons why people end up on the street. Moreover homelessness requires constant change to policies adaptation to the population trends and needs at any given time. Bibliography Amster, Randall.

Street People And The Contested Realms of Public Space. LFB Scholarly Publication LLC: New York, 2004. Arnold, R. Kathleen. Homelessness, Citizenship, and Identity. State University of New York Press: Albany 2004.

Baumohl, Jim. Homelessness in America. The Oryx press: Phoenix, Arizona 1996. Bogard, Cynthia J. Seasons Such As These.

Walter de Gruyter: New York 2003. Borchard, Kurt. The Word on the Street. University of Nevada Press: Reno and Las Vegas 2005. Criswell, Sara Dixon.

Homelessness. Lucent Books: San Diego, CA 1998. Cunningham, Mary, Meghan Henry, and Webb Lyons. " Ending Homeless Among Veterans. The Homeless Reserch in Institute at the National Allian to end Homelessness: Washington DC 2007. Jeacks, Christopher.

The Homeless. Harvard University Press: 1994. Karabanow, Jeff. Being Young And Homeless. Peter Lang, INC: New York 2004.

Marcus, Anthony. Where Have All The Homeless Gone?. Berghahn Books: New York. Oxford 2006.

Robertson, J Marjorie, and Milton Greenblatt. Homelessness A National Perspective. Plenum Press: New York and London 1992. William, Jean Caltoerone. A Roof Over My Head.

UP Colorado: Boulder, Colorado 2003.