Homelessness In The United States

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Introduction

Imagine living a life without a shelter over your head, without a bed to sleep in, and roaming around without any destination, without a home. Individuals and families experience homelessness and seek temporary residence wherever they find a place to sleep, including public shelters, camps for homeless people, their vehicles, a bench in a park, someone's garage, or a friend's couch.

Numerous factors can result in homelessness and loss of shelter, such as economic, social, and political instability and natural disasters that destroy the houses of many families. Homelessness is often caused by poverty, unemployment, and system failures in the United States, where the government fails to provide for the majority of the lower-income groups.

This topic is examined further in Poverty In The United States.

Even though the number of homeless people is increasing and is affecting thousands of lives, very little is done to address the issue; instead, ineffective methods are used to provide short-term shelters that have made the matter worse.

Discussion

Homelessness is a critical issue in the United States that has existed since the pre-revolutionary period. People lost shelter and were forced out of their houses during the colonial period due to economic and social factors (Gale 2017). Even though the increase in homelessness was due to external factors, it was blamed on individual character flaws and moral deficiency.

Matters became worse, and the number of homeless people increased significantly during the urbanization period in the mid-1800s. Additionally, the aftermath of the American Civil War in 1865 left many citizens without shelter, and with the combination of industrialization, many rural residents moved toward the cities to seek employment. According to the National Bureau of Economic Research, the number of homeless people reached 10 percent during the late 1890s while it increased to 11.7% by the 1920s. Moreover, the consequences of the Great Depression of 1929 involved high rates of unemployment and homelessness (Smith, Doug 2016).

In modern times, the overall standard of living has increased; however, this does not mean that the

issue of homelessness has been addressed. According to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development, the Annual Homeless Assessment Report of 2016 records an estimated 550,000 people who were experiencing homelessness. Among this homeless population, 68% were accommodated in transitional housing programs, and 32% were unsheltered; moreover, 22% of them were under the age of 18. This is evidence of the failure of the system to provide adequate programs that target the core of the problem instead of giving temporary solutions (US Homeless Population, 2016).

While some experts believe that homelessness is both a mental health problem and an economic problem, others blame it on social problems such as drug addiction, alcoholism, family issues, teenage pregnancies, poverty, low living standards, and lack of education and jobs (Holden, C. 1986). The problem lies in people blaming the victims of homelessness for their situation, while it is the structural nature of unemployment and the instability of the economy that has resulted in a high number of unsheltered people.

One of the primary causes of homelessness is the insufficient income levels of the majority of the population. People who are employed but do not earn enough to provide for food every day are not able to afford the rent of a house, nor are they eligible for a loan to buy a house of their own. This issue can also be blamed on the increasing inflation and the high rates of rent and housing in the urban areas, where most of the people are on the streets or in public shelters.

Secondly, high rates of unemployment can be caused by structural reasons, such as the shutting down of an industry or the low levels of demand for a specific sector, which results in the redundancy of labor. Additionally, frictional and cyclic unemployment also lead to a large number of people on the roads struggling to earn a living. The unemployed generation might receive unemployment benefits from the government; however, it is not enough to live a decent life and own a house or afford the high levels of rent. Financial help providers also reject loan requests from unemployed people and the homeless generation that already has a negative impression of being involved in criminal activities or drug abuse (National Law Center 2018).

Thirdly, the failure of the system affects the number of people on the streets. This occurs when the system fails to provide care for the vulnerable population that ends up without shelter as a result. System failure includes failure of transitions from child welfare, the discharge of patients from hospitals that are not yet ready for everyday challenges, lack of support for immigrants and refugees, domestic violence of children and women in the society, and the lack of shelters for the disabled generation (Embleton, L., Lee, H., Gunn, J., Ayuku, D., & Braitstein, P. 2016).

The issue can be addressed with a better healthcare system, educational services, and more job opportunities, as this will target the primary cause of the problem of homelessness. If the government fails to recognize the significance of the matter and cater to it ineffectively, the number of homeless people will not decrease anytime soon.

Conclusion

The reasons behind homelessness go back to the times of colonization, and it can be concluded that the problem has existed since the very beginning. However, modern-day homelessness can be blamed on other reasons that are not impossible to address and solve the matter entirely or at least minimize the effects. Research shows that homelessness can be connected to domestic violence, poverty, racial discrimination, and unemployment. Thus, the matter needs to be solved by catering to the core reasons.

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