

Homelessness and its Impact on Children : Examining Physical Health, Emotional Well-being, Education and Social Development

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A complicated socioeconomic problem, homelessness has a big impact on people and communities. Homelessness is a widespread issue that affects people of all ages and ethnicities, but children are among the most susceptible populations. A child's physical, emotional, and mental health, as well as their intellectual and social growth, can all suffer from homelessness. The purpose of this study paper is to examine the impacts of homelessness on children, its origins and effects, as well as potential solutions. The introduction of the paper gives a definition of homelessness and an outline of how common it is among kids, children and

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youngsters. It then examines the causes and effects of homelessness on children, including the impact on physical health, emotional well-being, education, and social development. Finally, the paper explores the interventions that can be used to address homelessness among children, including housing assistance, healthcare, and educational support.

[**Keywords** : Homelessness, Physical health, Emotional well-being, Social development].

1. Introduction

Homelessness is a significant social issue that affects millions of people worldwide. Homelessness is generally defined as a state in which an individual or family lacks a stable, safe, and secure place to live, either because they cannot afford housing or because they are unable to find suitable housing. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, an estimated 552,830 people experienced homelessness on any given night in the United States in 2018 (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2019). Among this population, a significant proportion is children. According to the National Centre on Family Homelessness, there were an estimated 2.5 million homeless children in the United States in 2013 (National Centre on Family Homelessness, 2014).

The impact of homelessness on children is significant and far-reaching. Homelessness can affect a child's physical health, emotional well-being, education, and social development. Children who experience homelessness are at increased risk of developing chronic health conditions, such as asthma and malnutrition, as well as experiencing emotional and mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression. Homelessness can also have a significant impact on a child's education, as children who are homeless are more likely to experience disruptions to their schooling, and are less likely to graduate from high school.

The causes of homelessness among children are complex and multifaceted. Poverty, lack of affordable housing, domestic violence, and substance abuse are all significant factors that contribute to homelessness among children. Additionally, children who experience homelessness are more likely to have experienced trauma, abuse, and neglect.

Despite the significant impact of homelessness on children, there are interventions that can be used to address this issue. Housing assistance, healthcare, and educational support are all

important interventions that can help to prevent and mitigate the negative effects of homelessness on children. This research paper aims to explore the impact of homelessness on children, the causes and effects of homelessness, and the interventions that can be used to address this issue.

2. Defining Homelessness

Defining homelessness is a complex task, as there are many different forms of homelessness, and homelessness can be experienced in many different ways. The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines homelessness as “a person or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate night time residence” (United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2019). This definition includes people who are living in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or places not meant for human habitation, such as cars or abandoned buildings.

Another definition of homelessness is provided by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, which defines homelessness as “an individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate night time residence, meaning :

- i. An individual or family with a primary night time residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground.
- ii. An individual or family living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, or local government programmes)
- iii. An individual who is exiting an institution where he or she resided for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution” (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2019).

It is important to note that the definition of homelessness can vary depending on the context and the country in question. For example, in some countries, people who are living in overcrowded or

substandard housing may be considered homeless, while in other countries, only those who are sleeping rough or living in emergency shelters are considered homeless.

3. Prevalence of Homelessness among Children

Homelessness is a significant problem for children worldwide. According to the National Centre on Family Homelessness, an estimated 2.5 million children in the United States experienced homelessness at some point during 2013 (National Centre on Family Homelessness, 2014). This represents an increase of 8% since 2010. In the United Kingdom, an estimated 131,000 children were homeless in 2016 (Shelter, 2016).

The prevalence of homelessness among children is particularly high among certain populations. For example, children who are living in poverty, children who are from ethnic minority backgrounds, and children who have experienced abuse or neglect are at increased risk of experiencing homelessness.

4. Causes of Homelessness among Children

The causes of homelessness among children are complex and multifaceted. Poverty, lack of affordable housing, domestic violence, and substance abuse are all significant factors that contribute to homelessness among children.

Poverty is one of the primary causes of homelessness among children. Children who are living in poverty are more likely to experience housing instability, as they may struggle to afford rent, utilities, and other basic necessities. In addition, children who are living in poverty are more likely to experience food insecurity, which can further exacerbate their housing instability.

Lack of affordable housing is another significant factor that contributes to homelessness among children. In many cities and towns, the cost of housing has increased significantly in recent years, making it difficult for low-income families to find affordable housing. This can lead to overcrowding, substandard living conditions, and, ultimately, homelessness.

Domestic violence is another factor that can contribute to homelessness among children. Children who are living in households where domestic violence is present may feel unsafe and may be forced to flee their homes in order to escape the violence.

Substance abuse is another significant factor that can contribute to homelessness among children. Parents who are struggling with substance abuse may be unable to provide a stable and safe home environment for their children, which can lead to housing instability and homelessness.

5. Effects of Homelessness on Children

Homelessness can have a significant impact on a child's physical health, emotional well-being, education, and social development and this research paper also aims to examine the impact with these four key areas :

5.1 Physical Health

A child's physical health may be significantly impacted by homelessness. Homeless children are more likely to experience hunger, dental issues, sleep disorder, asthma, hormone disbalance and other chronic illnesses that require ongoing treatment. In addition, they are more prone to get injuries from falls and burns due to poor housing conditions. The stress and volatility that come with being homeless can also make pre-existing health conditions, such mental health problems, worse.

5.2 Emotional Well-being

Homelessness can also have a significant impact on a child's emotional well-being. Children who are homeless are at increased risk of experiencing emotional and mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Homelessness can also lead to feelings of isolation, shame, and low self-esteem. Furthermore, the constant instability and uncertainty that comes with being homeless can lead to a sense of hopelessness and despair, which can have lasting effects on a child's emotional state.

5.3 Education

Homelessness can have a significant impact on a child's education. Children who are homeless are more likely to experience disruptions to their schooling, as they may have to change schools frequently or may not have access to transportation to get to school. As a result, homeless children are more likely to fall behind in their studies and to experience academic difficulties. In addition, homeless children are more likely to drop out of school altogether,

which can have long-term consequences for their future opportunities and success. Moreover, homelessness can limit a child's access to educational resources, such as books, technology, and other materials that are essential for academic success.

5.4 Social Development

Homelessness can also have a profound impact on a child's social development. Homeless children are more likely to experience social isolation and difficulties in forming and maintaining relationships with peers and adults. This can lead to feelings of loneliness, low self-esteem, and a lack of social skills that can persist into adulthood. Homelessness can also limit a child's exposure to positive role models and experiences that are essential for healthy social and emotional development. Children who are homeless may have limited opportunities for social interaction which lead to feelings of social isolation and can make it difficult for children to form positive relationships with their peers.

6. Interventions to Address Homelessness among Children

Addressing homelessness among children requires a multifaceted approach that includes both short-term and long-term interventions. Some of the key interventions that have been effective in addressing homelessness among children include :

- 1. Housing Assistance Programmes :** Programmes that provide temporary housing assistance to families who are experiencing homelessness can be effective in helping families to stabilize their housing situations and to prevent long-term homelessness.
- 2. Education and Employment Services :** Programmes that provide education & employment services to homeless families can help to improve their long-term economic stability and to reduce their risk of experiencing homelessness in the future.
- 3. Mental Health and Support Services :** Programmes that provide mental health and support services to homeless children and families can help to address the emotional and psychological impact of homelessness and to improve their overall well-being.

4. **Child Welfare Services** : Child welfare services can play a critical role in addressing homelessness among children who are experiencing abuse or neglect. These services can help to ensure that children are safe and have access to appropriate services and supports.

7. Conclusion

Homelessness is a significant problem for children worldwide, with complex and multifaceted causes and far-reaching consequences for children's physical health, emotional well-being, education, and social development. Addressing homelessness among children requires a multifaceted approach that includes both short-term and long-term interventions, with a focus on providing housing assistance, education and employment services, mental health and support services, and child welfare services. By working together to address this issue, we can help to ensure that all children have access to safe, stable, and supportive housing and the opportunities they need to thrive.

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