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Understanding Homelessness

Homelessness surrounds our everyday life. The unfortunate homeless can be found everywhere in public: alone on a bench to a busy street, sleeping outdoors to the concrete floor of metro stations. The issue is apparent yet seems invisible to the eyes of public transport passengers and passers-by. It is ironic how such an apparent problem is intentionally ignored and avoided by the public. Thus, it is essential to address this issue to not only inform but allow readers to understand and sympathize with the unfortunate individuals without a shelter. This essay explores the ongoing problem of homelessness in Canada and reasons behind the complex issue.

Homelessness touches the lives of many in Canada. According to “The State of Homelessness in Canada 2016”, a research paper published by the non-profit research institute Canadian Observatory On Homelessness, 35 000 Canadians are homeless per night while at least 235 000 struggle to find shelter in a year (Gaetz, DeJ et al. 5). This statistic equally means that for every 1000 Canadians, approximately one is homeless. The significant number of cases is catastrophic given the harsh and unforgiving weather conditions of Canada in winter and spring. The problem worsens as the composition of homelessness changes and grows more diverse (Gaetz, DeJ et al. 12). Different from the past when older men compose the majority of the homeless, there has been an increase of homelessness among other groups of the population such as families, youth, Indigenous people, newcomers and members from the LGBTQ community in

recent years (Gaetz , Dej et al. 12). For instance, women now form 27.3% of the homeless while youth follow with an astounding percentage of 18.7. (Gaetz, Dej et al. 5). The reason why homelessness women and youth are less noticeable is because not all homeless are absolute homeless and must resort to the street. Homelessness can be divided into four main categories: Unsheltered refers to people dwelling on the street or places not intended for living; Emergency Sheltered concerns those residing temporarily in shelters, Provisionally Accommodated includes those whose housings are temporarily or are without the security of tenure; At Risk of Homeless specify non-homeless individuals whose financial situation is in peril or whose accommodation does not satisfy the health and safety standard (Gaetz, Donaldson et al. 4). Therefore, the numerous unhoused men who suffer from chronic homelessness on the street merely represent the tip of the iceberg and only the visible surface of the problem. Not only the number of homeless people rises but a wider range of the population is also touched by this crisis. Homelessness threatens the health and security of many from various backgrounds.

According to “The State of Homelessness in Canada 2013”, a Homeless Hub research paper, homelessness is a result of three main causes: structural factors, system failures and individual and relational factors (Gaetz, Donaldson et al. 13). Structural factors are financial and social issues that influence one’s community such as “the lack of adequate income, access to affordable housing and health supports and/or the experience of discrimination” (Gaetz, Donaldson et al. 13). System failure ensues when policies and various systems such as healthcare institutions, corrections and child welfare fail to support the vulnerable population, leaving them exposed to homelessness (Gaetz, Donaldson et al. 2013 13). Individual and relational factors encompass all private situations that originate or are originated from homelessness (Gaetz, Donaldson et al. 2013 13). These three causes can be reflected in a study conducted by Dr.

Ahajumobi from Walden University. In this study, fifteen Canadian participants of various backgrounds who were once homeless are interviewed to share their past experiences and their perspective about homelessness (Ahajumobi 111). The most notable themes are lack of money and support, discrimination, mental illness and addictions are present among participants as both lived experiences and potential causes and/or consequences of homelessness (Ahajumobi 112). These themes can be categorized into the three causes of homelessness above: discrimination as structural factor; lack of support and money as system failure; mental illness and addictions as individual factors. Subthemes derived from the study such as separation, lack of affordable housing, economic recessions, lack of employment skills all play major roles in homelessness (Ahajumobi 113). Unlike most stigmas and stereotypes views of homelessness, vagrancy is not always created by personal factors but numerous other social circumstances and systemic variables.

In conclusion, homelessness is a social crisis caused by an accumulation of multiple intricate factors. Next time one takes a walk at night, one should consider a second glance at the rough sleeper two steps away.

Works Cited

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