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Homelessness in Australia: Analysis of Mandy's life

Introduction

The ABC news video shows van life of a homeless woman named Mandy. She is living in a van with her dog when she has no money to pay rent and bills. She is in search of affordable food, secure places to sleep and having a stable life. Her story is an example that housing crises are increasing in Australia because of high paying living. She shares the living unsafe in the streets of Australia with no job, unstable, insecure and stressful physical and emotional health (ABC News, 2023) This essay discusses the concepts of social exclusion, stigma and discrimination when someone is living in poor conditions.

Challenges of Homelessness in Australia

Homelessness in Australia is increasing because of unemployment and high living cost.

According to a census conducted in 2021, around 122,000 people were recorded to be homeless, the ones who were spending their lives in cars, tents or in temporary accommodations (Australian Bureau Statistics (ABS), 2021). This is due to the rentals rising faster than the wage increases. There is no affordable housing for people with low incomes, who eventually run out of incomes due to bills, fines and other running costs, and are then left short to pay the increasing rental (AHURI, 2020). People who are earning a low income and have no secure place to live then homelessness is impossible to avoid.

For people, like Mandy, who are spending their lives in cars, face health and safety challenges. They face struggles such as finding a clean bathroom to use, searching for safe and secure places to park the car when they are sleeping, and a place to safely store their belongings. The

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2023) reports that many homeless people face chronic illnesses, mental health problems and inadequate medical treatments. Another issue that they face is unavailability of an address, they find it hard to apply to jobs, receive daily mails, and stay in contact with the support services. According to Homelessness Australia (2025), old-aged women are the ones who are facing homelessness the most due to low-incomes and rising rents.

Factors that led Mandy to live in the Car

Following are the three contributing factors that made Mandy make such a decision. It shows how homelessness is not caused by one major factor but it is due to multiple pressures that come up in your way because of society.

- Financial Stress

Mandy's inability to keep up with the rents and bills. She explained that once she missed a payment, other payments and fines kept on piling up. This is a common issue that once you miss a payment, other payments and the fines keep on building up, which makes it hard to keep up with the limited income and then debt kept increases (AHURI, 2020).

- Health Problems

The reason that Mandy had come to the position to live in the car was because she had to discontinue her job as a school crossing guard due to her heart condition. As she was not working, she depended on the Disability Support Pension, which was not enough money to afford food for herself, her dog, decent housing, and petrol (ABC News, 2023). One of the main reasons why people are homeless in Australia is when they are unable to work due to health-related conditions.

- Lack of Affordable Housing

Even when Mandy tried to find affordable housing, the rents were too high for someone on a pension. She attended open-houses but either the houses were too expensive or already taken by others. Landlords were not welcoming people who survived on government support (ABS, 2023)

Social Capital and Social Exclusion

 Social capital is the support we get from relationships-friends, family, neighbors or community groups. It can be emotional or financial help, even an advice would count (Ayed, 2021). People with social capital are less prone to be homeless as they have contact who can lend a room, offer some money or help find a job.

Mandy's story has both these concepts. She depends on food banks and community services, and also takes help from family. Her social capital is limited as no one in her family can offer her a safe place to stay. Her health is not good so she cannot be a part of community services or find work.

She is socially excluded too. Without having an address, she faces difficulties in applying for rentals, and needs to move her van from place to place to avoid fines. She is not able to live a normal routine life like other people living in their homes. Her video shows that people who have no money like no having no social capital find it hard to come out of homelessness and face increased mental and physical stress conditions.

Stigma and Discrimination

Stigma is when people are judged or blamed for their conditions. Discrimination is when such judgements lead to unfair treatments Reilly (2022). Many people judge homeless people as lazy, jobless or addicted, rather than understanding their conditions of rents rising and health problems. Mandy has expressed how people bang on her windows, yelling to get a job, without considering her issues. This is how stigma works.

Society is not accepting Mandy and she is being discriminated. This include landlords not giving homes to people living on pensions, government creating rules on banning sleeping in the cars, or healthcare workers things that homeless people will not come to their appointments. Mandy might not be willing to go to hospitals, shelters or police for help. Stigma and discrimination increase social exclusion. They make feel people worse, alone and non-existence by the society.

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