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Homelessness Surrounding U.S Veterans

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**1. Problem identification**

The United States government defines homelessness as lacking a permanent, steady, and suitable nightly home. If they sleep, they do so in a shelter meant for temporal living housings or in residences not chosen for human occupancy. Historically, the social problem of homelessness in the United States has existed since the 1700s (Cronley, 2010). Annually, the issue is estimated to affect approximately 2.3-3.5 million people across the country. Existing research shows that homelessness has remained a subject of great concern to the media, universities, and policymakers since the 1960s. Much of the research has focused on explaining the causes of homelessness.

Empirical evidence continually suggests that structural problems at the society level cause homelessness while policymakers increasingly associate homelessness with individual factors. The difference between the causes of the problem has caused critical debate over the years. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness (2020 edition), in every 10 000 individuals in the U.S, 17 were homeless on a one night in January 2019. This was during HUD’s Annual Point-in-Time Count. These 567, 715 individuals exemplify a cross-section of the United States. They are linked with every nation’s state, household status, gender group and racial group.

**2. Persons affected by the problem**

Different groups of people are affected by the issue of homelessness. These include; single adults, children and families, veterans, disabled people, and youths. Within this focus, the social problem being examined is the issue of homelessness amongst veterans. According to the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (V.A.), America’s homeless veterans are mainly male, with approximately 9% being women (Brignone et al., 2016). Large figures of homeless veterans are single; stay in cities; suffer from psychological disorders, alcoholism or substance use, co-occurring illnesses. V.A. also states that 11% of the adult homeless people are veterans. Additionally, these statistics also show that about 45% of these homeless veterans are African Americans or Hispanics, in spite of only representing 10.4% and 3.4% of the country’s veteran populace correspondingly. The affected veterans are averagely younger than the whole veteran population. Roughly 9% of homeless veterans are aged 18-30 years, and 41% are aged 31-50.

On the other hand, only 5% of the entire veterans’ population is between 18 and 30 years, and less than 23% of the total population is between 31 and 50 years. Many homeless veterans served in various wars like World War II, Vietnam, Persian Gulf, Cold, Iraq, and Afghanistan wars. Roughly half of the homeless veterans worked in the Vietnam period (Tsai et al., 2016). Two-thirds of these veterans served the nation for roughly three years, and one-third worked in a war zone. However, nearly 1.4 million other veterans are taken to be on the verge of homelessness due to poverty, absence of sustenance systems, and miserable living situations in congested housing.

**3. First occurrence of the problem and how it has changed over time.**

Homelessness among U.S. veterans has been there for over five decades. It dates back to the colonial period, and the increasing numbers of vagabonds were witnessed in cities in the wake of the Revolutionary War. The post-civil period saw national growth in homelessness among U.S. veterans. One of the reasons homelessness among veterans rose after the Civil War was the huge economic dislocation resulting from the war and the subsequent economic recession. The Great Depression’s homelessness crisis affected most World War I veterans. This was intensely abated in the early 1940s by the recruitment of many Americans in the armed forces as well as by the wartime economic improvement.

The connection between homelessness and military veterans later came to the general public’s attention with the Vietnam War's dawn. After the end of the war, many homeless veterans in their 20s and 30s and mainly Blacks and Hispanics, started appearing on the streets (Tsai, 2018). Modern homelessness finally emerged by the late 1970s, and a significant number of veterans were seen sleeping outdoors in New York City and other large cities across the U.S. the 1991 Gulf War also made many veterans homeless. Additionally, the war on Iraq1 and Afghanistan, the last major wars involving the U.S. military, also left many veterans suffering from physical and mental disorders and confronting homelessness. Currently, HUD (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development) approximates that there are 40 056 homeless veterans on any given night (National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, 2021).

**4. Where the problem occurs**

Historically, homelessness among veterans emerged as a national problem in the 1870s. Early homeless veterans lived in large urban cities like New York. The problem of homeless among veterans occurs at the national scope. Most homeless veterans live in major urban cities, and once they face this problem, they are encouraged to visit or contact the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans and seek help.

**5. Why the problem occurred and why it persists.**

The homelessness problem among veterans occurred and persisted because of multiple reasons. The first reason is the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder after war. Many veterans experience PTSD because of painful experiences at warzones. Secondly, veterans may become homeless due to substance abuse resulting from the absence of family and societal backing networks. They can also become homeless due to a shortage of affordable housing, livable salary, and entree to health care (Tsai & Rosenheck, 2015). Additionally, many veterans are disadvantaged when searching for employment because most military occupations are not moveable to the civilian workforce (Hopper, 2003). According to the conflict theory by Karl Marx, societies exist in a state of continual conflict because of competition for rare resources.

Regarding the issue of homelessness among veterans, there are set factors that cause the problem. In the United States, veterans may become homeless because they cannot access affordable health care and housing and earn a livable income. Empirical evidence increasingly shows that structural problems in societies cause homelessness. The social constructionism theory notes how people's interaction with their immediate societies and world gives significance to otherwise valueless things and creates society’s reality. Several veterans become homeless because of absence of domestic as well as social support systems from their immediate societies.

**6. How human rights are reflected and various factors related to the problem**

According to the United Nation’s universal declaration of people rights, every person has the right to a standard of living acceptable for the health as well as the well-being of themselves and their families. In article 25, every individual has the right to food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and basic social services (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 2021). Additionally, every human has the right to security when they are jobless, sick, disabled, widowed, old aged, and lack livelihood in situations beyond their control.

Veterans are not exempted from this right, and they deserve to have homes. They are eligible to have homes and live in environments where they can easily access social support networks. Additionally, veterans may suffer from PTSD and substance abuse because of painful experiences in war zones. This may result in negligence from their family members and become homeless. Also, they may be unable to secure other jobs once they retire or become disabled in their line of duty. This calls for various human rights bodies like the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans to ensure homeless veterans’ rights are followed and respected. Veterans also deserve to be helped to cope with the hard economic conditions facing many of them.

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