**Feeding Homeless Youth During COVID-19**

Social Welfare Policy & Institutions

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**Introduction**

Housing plays an integral role in the well-being of youth and American citizens in general. Youth can be classified as homeless if their entire family is homeless or when they are generally unaccompanied and homeless at the same time. There are various reasons as to why the youth may become homeless ranging from economic to social factors. In 2020, when the pandemic struck, the number of homeless youth in the United States went up, partially the reason for the Feeding Homeless Youth during COVID-19 Act. This paper explores the causes of the problem being addressed by this Act, the extent to which the policy responds to the social situation. The article will then have a section of proposals or amendments to ensure that the bill sufficiently helps in solving the problem.

**Causes of the Problem Addressed by the Policy**

The Act aims to increase food access to homeless young adults up to the age of 25. One of the major causes of the problem addressed by the policy was the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic caught the entire world by shock. The World Health Organization then issued directives to ensure the protection of the population's health around the globe. These directives started eating into the economy with international borders closed, social gatherings banned (in some places), and jobs closed. This led to various people, especially the youth who had just started employment to lose their jobs. The loss of employment for some of these youth meant that they could not pay rent or even provide food for themselves, leading to their homelessness (Fitzpatrick & Willis, 2021). While talking about the economic factors and how they have played a role in the homelessness of the youth, it is also essential to address the issue of the youth whose entire families lost their income and therefore had to become homeless due to the same. Other youths do not have parents and guardians whom they can run to in such a crisis and thus had no option other than become homeless when the pandemic struck (Auerswald et al., 2020).

While the pandemic can be blamed solely for accelerating the numbers of homeless youth, it is also essential to understand that this is a problem that has been in society for quite a long time. This brings in the other cause of the problem addressed by the policy, which is broken family relationships. Duffield (2020) notes that most homeless youths cite fleeing family conflicts and volatile family contexts. When many youths who have parents and families were forced to go back to them in the age of the pandemic, they likely left again due to the family relationships. There is also the other group of youth who would rather stay homeless after losing their sources of income than go back to their families. Another group of homeless youth is those who were in unstable or temporary living conditions. These include people living on couches of friends and relatives. When the pandemic struck and with the uncertainty surrounding it, most families wanted to only live with their 'family members or those they could trust as a protection measure from the pangs of the pandemic (O’Brien et al., 2021). This may have widely led to youth being thrown out and consequently homelessness. Homelessness among some youth is also caused by mental disorders in their early stages and not yet uncovered and substance abuse (Buchnea & McKitterick, 2020).

**The extent to Which the Policy Addresses the Specific Causes of the Problem**

From the findings above, youth homelessness is caused by deeply family rooted issues, economic problems, and for some youth, mental and substance abuse problems. The bill addresses the lack of shelter for homeless youth by allowing them access to emergency shelters. It also provides the homeless youth with food as part of their essential needs. However, it is crucial to recognize that homelessness will still accelerate with these approaches if another pandemic were to strike. This is because the policy does not address more deeply rooted problems of the issue of homelessness. The instability in the places of work leading to economic instability should be something to address. the deeply rooted issue of family conflicts and volatile relationships that lead to homelessness should also focus on eliminating the current causes of the problem. Lastly, there should be a look into mental use and substance disorders among youth to prevent them from becoming homeless in the future. The lack of this may lead to a cycle of coming up with policies that, in the end, are always ineffective and do not allow for dealing with the problem sufficiently.

**Suggested Amendments**

The policy focuses on providing food for homeless youth during the pandemic, and this is where the first suggestion for amendment lies. The policy should expand for the provision of food for homeless youth beyond the pandemic. It is also vital that the policy considers its long-term implications. As such, it should not limit itself to the provision of food. Instead, there should also be a focus on getting help, such as family counseling and economic enabling activities for the homeless youth. The introduction of such problems will help restore the independence of the homeless youth economically and psychologically. As such, they will not have to constantly rely on government intervention as the policies will have eliminated the need for the homeless youth to have the cycle of going back to the shelters always. Implementing these may require more investments in the policy as it will engage social workers, psychologists, and even the private and public sectors to provide jobs. Still, it will be worth the results in the long run.

**References**

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