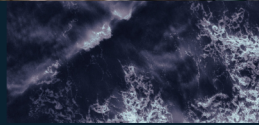
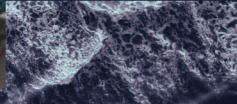


Why The Kids Call the Streets Their Home

Why Youth Are Homeless



ABSTRACT

Homelessness is said to be when one cannot find a fixed source of residence to sleep at for the night. A stigmatized topic, youth homelessness is a global issue that affects children even on the streets of America. Despite the claims that society cares for children, it is far too common to see youth aged below 21 on a corner, alone and afraid. Society has found it easier to shun youth they see as unfit or not matching their expectations than to care for them as children deserve to be cared for. Despite the amount of resources set in place, youth homelessness is on the rise due to community and societal failures that continue the cycle of homelessness.

Why Should We Care?

About 1 in 10 young adults aged 18 to 25 were said to be experiencing homelessness every year, this number said to have risen post COVID-19; about 42% of this population experience homelessness more than once (Gewirtz et al, 2021). Homelessness as a definition does not mean just not having a literal home. It also refers to those who are unable to find a place for the night, steady shelter, and even those who are couch surfing. In the case of youth, this definition applies to primarily those under 21 (Tompson et al., 2009). This population is also the most vulnerable when it comes to sex trafficking and being assaulted as well.



SOME COMMON REASONS (ISSUES TO ACKNOWLEDGE)

Mental health and substance abuse are two common reasons that guardians might oust a youth. From a systematic review compiled from multiple counts of quantitative research, it was shown that discharged rehabilitated youth under the age of 19 were 1.9 times more likely to be homeless (Grattan et al., 2022). In current society, taking substances is associated with the homeless – this view does not extend to viewing addiction as a problem, rather it paints a very stereotypical and harmful picture of homeless folk using they receive to buy drugs. This stigma further demonizes youth and makes it difficult for them to seek care or aid without the judgment or bias from healthcare providers (Grattan et al., 2022). The stigma itself makes it difficult for youth to receive the help they need to get better or gives them the hope that they can recover

Sexual and gender orientations straying from the cisheteronormative views are also demonized by both families and society, making it difficult for youth to feel comfortable within their own homes as their own self (Grattan et al., 2022). Trans youth or those who didn't identify as their biological sex were the most vulnerable population amongst these youth, with high rates of suicide and abuse reported (Grattan et al, 2025).

Systemic racism is a factor – black American youth are four times more likely to be victims of homelessness compared to any other ethnic groups (Willison et al., 2024). This is only spurred on by the racist policies that specifically target minority populations and preying on their weaknesses. Even now, many communities are still reeling and trying to heal from the government specifically failing them, eg. Hurricane Katrina, immigration laws, the drug epidemic within vulnerable populations aswell as new artificial intelligence hubs being built right on top of water sources for poor minorities (Patel and Schmidt, 2018). Through the lack of consequences faced by the very people who claim to serve these communities, a feeling of distrust is instilled into their audiences from a very young age.

Mistrust in the government and the overall stigma associated with being homeless make it difficult for young people to accept resources that could help them or deter them from going to shelters. Abuse victims and/or those who have struggled with authority figures in the past also do not like shelters due to the strict enforcement of rules (Winiarski et al., 2021). Without a form of transportation or having someone who could transport them means many of these youth cannot even access these shelters; many are not even aware that these resources exist because of their youth and lack of information. In some states, even gaining access to these shelters requires parental or guardian permission.

Homelessness as a whole is a societal and government problem. This means that trying to erase homelessness is very difficult, but these problems make it seem like the unhoused do not deserve to be members of society. Criminalizing homelessness only makes it harder for those unhoused, especially young people, to find a place to stay. The promotion of behavioral interventions can provide a therapeutic change through helping providers understand the negative factors in these youth's lives (Slesnick et al., 2009). For those struggling with addiction from a young age, it is best to approach them with immense empathy as well as encouraging rehabilitation and therapy. Making resources more accessible and promoting them for awareness is also important.

WHAT WE CAN DO

At the root of it all, extending kindness and compassion to these youth, despite what they are going through, is the best option. Breaking the stigma associated with being homeless is a huge step towards change. Society does not view those who are homeless in a good light; youth who are homeless are seen automatically as delinquents just from appearances. In many cases, the stigma is what causes youth to return to a life of transience since they are made to believe they will never succeed (Le and Rew, 2025). To an extent, society doesn't stop the cycle or step in when needed – this is also something that needs to be changed or at least acknowledged as harmful. Supporting safe and affordable housing for the homeless and viewing a home as a basic human right, as opposed to something for those who can only afford it, would also help.

CONCLUSION

There is a lack of focus - or even care - for the issue that is youth homelessness. despite the resources available through the form of shelters, drop in centers, food shelters, and even safe spaces, the underlying causes of homelessness is never addressed; rather, it is merely seen as a 'normal' issue plaguing society. without the village wanting to show change and take initiative to protect their children, teaching the youth that they are worth caring for, then will these youth understand that they are safe. We teach children that their worth fits within society guidelines, without acknowledging that they are more than a bar that needs to be met.



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