Homeless Youth:
An Expression of External Factors and Human Agency Interactions

By

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Abstract

Understanding homeless youth requires deep exploration into the condition of those who live a street life. The purpose of this study is to improve understanding of homeless youth for policy makers and service providers to homeless youth. The review indicates that there are no clear or agreeable definitions of homelessness, and there are no particular plans from service providers in Canada to exit youth out of the streets. Addressing immediate needs for homeless youth is identified by service providers as the main solution to homelessness. The present research proposes that youth homelessness can be dealt with from a more inclusive, systematic perspective. From this view, anyone working with homeless youth could support exiting the street with a more integrated social plan. Such integration will be achieved by creating and connecting services leading youth to be part of the social norm. Consequently, youth go back to living not in isolation but as part of a bigger social group. Youth will stop being alienated and disengaged from any form of communal environment.

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Dedication

It is with gratitude and happiness that I dedicate this project to my wife, Ángela Hiraldo-Tejada, who shares my dreams of being a better person and creating a healthy space for us to live in harmony. To our beautiful baby boy, Andrés Tejada, who has brought a great sense of what it is like to care, to be a father, and who brings joy to both of us.

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Chapter I: Thesis Proposal

Background to the problem

The issue of homelessness in big cities poses a significant social concern for members of society, in particular Canadian cities. Sahoo Saddichha, Isabelle Linden, and Michael Reinhardt Krausz, have found that "It is however widely perceived that recorded numbers are steadily increasing upwards" (2014, p. 201). I argue that homeless youth in Vancouver, British Columbia do not seem to have adequate support. It appears that Vancouver is the landing place for youth from other provinces of this country and the US. It might be the case that for some youth arriving in Vancouver, it is like a new social experiment, a new adventure for them. Unfortunately, as Washington (2011) notes, youth may be travelling without any financial means and health-care plans. These are some of the confounding factors leading to homelessness. Regarding those factors that lead to youth to become homeless, it is very hard to know what really moves youth.

Statistically speaking, it is hard to know how many youth are on the streets of Vancouver on a given day. Cheng (2007) cites Eberle Planning, Kraus, Pomeroy, and Hulchanski, who estimated that there are between 300 and 700 youth on the streets on any given day (Cheng, 2007). In my view, one concern is understanding the substantial problems for this homeless population. Some researchers focus their investigation on factors that determine why youth run away from home. For instance, Dennis stated that

families of homeless youth face financial challenges to the point that they are not able to cope with the challenges anymore. More families become homeless (Dennis, 2010). Salomonsen-Sautel, Van Leeuwen, Gilroy, Boyle, Malberg, and Hopfer (2008) found that some youth leave home or are forced to leave home due to use of drugs or familial conflict and physical or sexual abuse. Fitzgerald examined child welfare practice in Canada and found that some homeless youth are or have been in care systems and states that "many adolescents currently in care have been in care previously as younger children; their lives reflect the long-term and continuing effects of unsupportive, damaging backgrounds" (Fitzgerald, p.718). Homeless youth, then, seem to develop less and less of a sense of home.

In some way or another, these factors explain the obvious problems that the homeless population faces on in day-to-day living. In my understanding, these factors seem to be part of what homelessness entails. Braciszewski stated that "whether on the streets, in shelters, or at home, homeless and other at-risk youth are often immersed in chaotic, transient, and dangerous living environments" (Braciszewski, 2010 p. 1). Braciszewski indicated that understanding homelessness is related to the kind of environment youth deal with during their developmental stages. It appears that if the family or social environments are not safe enough for these youth, living on the streets becomes a plausible alternative to some of them.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to conduct a literary review on the topic of homelessness in youth. More specifically, I will explore what constitutes a homeless youth and what services in general match their actual needs. Within the framework of homelessness, in this study, I explore factors that influence youth to choose life on the streets or to return home. I seek to offer a perspectival dimension to service providers from private and government agencies for youth living on the streets in Vancouver. In order to accomplish this task, I will conduct this study in the form of a literary review on the topic of homelessness.

There are a variety of services for homeless youth from government and private sectors; however, youth seem to remain stuck in homelessness. Edidin, Ganim, Hunter, Niranjan, and Karnik maintain that there are more life events in the lives of homeless youth: "Not only do these youth experience unstable housing, but most have faced extraordinary adversity prior to their homelessness. Many youth have contended with economic hardship, abuse, neglect, and a breakdown of the family" (2011, p. 368).

I strongly believe that in order to develop an acceptable understanding of homelessness, the following questions must be addressed: What constitutes homelessness? What factors contribute to homelessness? What other factors help homeless youth to reintegrate into society or return home?

Theoretical Framework

There are services available for those who are considered homeless youth. However, findings from the literature review also reveal that those services are working in isolation from the community in Vancouver. It seems important that those services be connected to other services in the community as well as to what youth say about the reality of living on the streets. My findings will help to provide a deeper understanding and stronger motivation to choose more consistent services in support of homeless youth. Service providers for homeless youth will hopefully begin to question the quality of services as well as the satisfaction of youth as recipients of those services.

In working with homeless youth in Vancouver, I have found the following information: It is very common to see youth referred to medical doctors, income assistance offices, food banks, and shelters. This appears to be a form of solving the problems for the homeless population. Edidin (2011), in her investigations of homeless youth, makes a point regarding community services: Service providers do not seem to be sure about the nature of the homeless population. Edidin says, "The unseen nature of homeless youth also likely contributes to the inadequate number and range of services to support homeless youth" (2011, p. 370). Most of studies I found refer to negative events in a youth's life as the main factors leading to homelessness. For some agencies in Vancouver, the above factors are the immediate reasons to support a person living on the streets. However, not much has been said about what youth have to say about their lives. In many instances, the personal stories of these youth are

consistently ignored. What seems necessary is to include youth voices and then to formulate adequate services for them.

After reviewing the literature regarding homeless youth and learning about the discrepancy between the literature and my work experience with homeless youth for over a decade, this is what I have found: Most of the services provided in Vancouver and other cities in North America are based on physical and mental health needs, medical and addiction problems, as well as legal and financial issues. I also have found that the narratives from youth and humanistic approaches are missing from those above mentioned services. For these reasons, I argue that youth voices should be included as part of service plans from these agencies.

Definition of Terms

Addictions: The definition of addiction is strictly about a compulsive and almost irresistible performance or consumption behaviour that interferes with the well-being of a person, including withdrawal effects. In general, drug addiction is a pattern of behaviour over which the person seems to lack control. Consequently, drug addiction is determined not by how often a person uses drugs or alcohol but by how the behaviour relates and affects a person's life (adapted from Goodman's definition, 2009).

Contributing Factors: These factors include sexual, verbal, and physical abuse, experimenting with illegal drugs, and poverty; they also include a lack of psycho-

education to children from parents regarding social problems. It also concerns the effects of a dysfunctional family in the life of youth.

Effective Services: Effective services are what the population receives when services provided are in direct relation to a population's physical, mental, psychological, and spiritual needs.

Homeless: A person who lives on the streets without a stable place to live in while facing poverty, addiction, mental health, and employment problems.

Mental Health: Any form of evaluation that affects youth performance like work activity, communication, and unusual behaviour due to personality disorders or other mental health issues.

Natural environment: Natural environment is youth living with biological parents and growing up in an environment free of abuse or other risk factors leading to youth running away from home.

Youth: Individuals under 21 years of age. Some agencies in Vancouver accept anyone who is 24 years of age. The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) in Vancouver supports youth up until 25 years old if those youths have been recipients of government care in the past.

Significance of the Study

In my study, I contribute to the development of a perspective based on direct work experience with homeless youth. It is essential for service providers to hear youth's stories, the narratives from a youth's perspective that could serve as a guideline for service providers' work. For instance, youth explain their life on the streets and offer reasons for their present situation. Service providers for homeless youth might begin to develop a stronger relationship with this population and thus become better able to support them.

I seek to develop a consistent understanding of the homeless population. My research opens the possibility for agencies, social program developers, and professionals in the area of social services to provide effective services for street-involved youth. It will be achieved by developing service coordination with other agencies serving the same population on the streets. This goal implies a development of an integrated service plan, which addresses a variety of youth's needs. I also envision that service providers and agencies who believe that no youth should be living on the streets will contemplate their present role as workers dealing with this population. Most of these workers believe in what they do and, for some of them, these findings will bring up questions about the quality of the work done for homeless youth at the present time.

In order to achieve my goals, I take on three main questions. The first question deals with the concept of what constitutes homeless youth. The second question points

at factors that contribute to youth homeless. The third question seeks factors that will

integrate youth living on the street into society. There is a lot of research addressing

factors that contribute to make youth homeless. However, there is less investigation on

those factors that contribute or motivate youth to go home. In this way, my research

adds another dimension to the present understanding of how to deal with homeless

youth as well as inspire communal and government agencies to work in conjunction to

support homeless youth.

Chapter 2: Definition of Homeless Youth

Homeless youth

Abstract

In this chapter, I explore what constitutes homelessness in youth and review definitions of homelessness and concerns about this population. In this chapter, I intend to report how service providers, program developers, and policy makers for youth living on the streets view their clientele. Are they homeless, youth in a homeless situation, or are these youth "runaways"? Is homelessness a form of social exclusion? Once on the streets, are homeless youth being served according to their needs by community services? What is the understanding of homeless youth by service providers? I will discuss how the available literature openly states that there are difficulties in defining and identifying features that characterize homeless youth. There are agencies that work within the framework of youth's immediate needs and, as such, these agencies face the same difficulties when trying to identify what these youth's goals are.

Keywords: Homeless, Definitions, perspectives

Introduction

Homelessness in youth is a complex issue that requires effective services. A lot of research, like the one conducted by Tompson (2010) and her team, has been carried out about the reasons (as their view) youth become homeless, but a lot of less has been done regarding factors that contribute to youth integrating back into society.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore homelessness in youth. The goal is to provide a definition of what constitutes homelessness in youth, and to outline concerns and perspective on homelessness. Adding to the goal of this work is the discussion of factors that contribute on becoming homeless as well as factors that support social and family integration for this population. This chapter is a literature review on what constitutes homelessness in youth. There is not much presented in the literature as a

possible solution to this problem, but there is a lot of information about why youth become homeless. In this chapter, I will argue that there are gaps in previously conducted research on the definition and understanding of homeless youth. These gaps prevent policy makers and service providers from gathering a cohesive view to understand the phenomenon of homelessness in youth.

Homelessness Concepts/Concerns

Researchers devote a lot of time to investigating a variety of reasons why the number of youth on the streets continues to grow. Just by counting youth on the street, could they be identified as homeless youth? What are the criteria for identifying youth as "homeless"? Saddichha, Linden, and Krausz (2014) expressed that the definition of homeless is a concern; it does not address what youth suffer on the street like mental health issues. In such a case, those needs of the homeless youth are not being met. For these researchers "homeless was defined as a living on the streets, in a shelter, couch surfing or having no fixed address" (2014, p. 202). The main finding for these investigators was high rates of drug abuse and mental health amidst youth living on the streets. Such elevated rates could indicate that current interventions lack efficacy in addressing homeless youth's specific needs (Saddichha et al., 2014). For the above researchers, the conditions that homeless youth face on the street, like mental health and addiction, are the most pressing aspect of investigation. However, their definition of homelessness in youth does not deal with factors like poverty or family history. In many cases, the above researchers do not factor in the fact that the standard of living

does not match the current salaries. There are addiction, sexual abuse, and neglect issues in families with homeless youth (Campbell and Durrah, 2012). Consequently, the criteria developed in their definition seem too simplistic to properly address the needs of homeless youth.

Campbell and Durrah (2012) report the difficulties researchers face when attempting to define homelessness. Campbell and Durrah found that many researchers agree that homelessness should be defined by a continuum of housing ranging from stable to precariously housed (Campbell and Durrah, 2012). For the above researchers, there are reasons to disagree with this definition due to the fact that anyone can spend the night in jail or at a park bench due to immediate circumstances. Youth who casually spend the night out in a place other than their own house will not be part of the continuum. Another reason is that the definition of homeless in this case is weak. The continuum framework includes those who casually spend the night away from home. However, these youth might never become homeless at all.

Patterson and Tweed (2009) stated that homelessness in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada is a temporary problem. They interviewed people in situations of homelessness in Surrey and Vancouver (British Columbia, Canada). Patterson and Tweed (2009) defined homelessness as "staying outdoors from evening until morning because they lacked acceptable housing" (2009, p. 853). The definition employed by Patterson and Tweed includes staying at shelters as an instance of homelessness (2009). According to Patterson and Tweed, homelessness is connected to the fact that

youth cannot access houses because they are poor. So the concern indeed is poverty (2009). Findings affirm the work done by service providers on supplementing basic needs for homeless youth (Patterson & Tweed, 2009). However, there are other factors that keep people in situations of homelessness. For instance, Saddichha et al. (2009) stated that some homeless youth claim to be physically and emotionally abused and neglected, so these elements could be factored in when defining the concept of homeless youth. However, Patterson and Tweed (2009) said that "policy that ignores the felt needs of people who are homeless may not only lack of compassion for these vulnerable people, but may also fail to achieve objective goals such as helping people move towards independence" (2009, p. 846).

There are many different criteria used to characterize homelessness. Washington (2011) aimed to analyse a conceptual meaning of the term "homeless youth." For Washington, a good definition included attributes, antecedents, and consequences (Washington, 2011). For instance, one attribute is a physical location: A youth goes from a permanent address to an impermanent location. Antecedents refer to mental health and drug addiction issues and the consequences are resilience, survival, length of homelessness (e.g., long-term homelessness), and health risk behaviours like the use of street drugs (Washington, 2011). The above criteria provide a broader definition from which to understand the goals and future plans of homeless youth. Washington argued that for future research, the inclusion of the above elements will enhance the

effectiveness of service providers' intervention (2011). Also, Washington expected that researchers might motivate themselves to do more work on homeless youth.

Campbell and Durrah (2012) found another aspect that adds to the complexity of this issue. They stated, "There is no consistency in the definition of these terms [outsiders, vagabonds, and travelling poor] as connotations are drawn from the attitudes and perceptions of the day" (p. 285). Campbell and Durrah challenged statistics of homelessness in general due to the fact that such statistics depend on how people define homelessness (2012). Campbell and Durrah argued that the definition of homelessness seems to be limited to what youth disclose as immediate needs. Youth might not be willing to tell their whole story yet. Agencies only see a fraction of the big homeless issue and then proceed to create their own definition of what this term means to them (Campbell and Durrah, 2012).

Perspectives on homelessness

Thompson, Bender, Winsor, Cook, and Williams (2010) suggested that definitions of homelessness for youth should include four categories: runaways, homeless youth, throwaways, and doubly homeless youth (Thompson et al., 2010). Runaways are those who leave home without parental consent. Homeless youth are those who reside for prolonged periods on the streets. Throwaway youth are those who are being pushed out of their homes. Doubly homeless youth are those who have been moved from their home by authorities and then run away from those placements (Sanna, 2010). For the above researchers, this division explains homelessness from the family, social,

institutional, and individual life experiences. The implication from this perspective is that children have an expectation concerning support. Instead, homeless youth experience neglect and rejection from family and social institutions. Understanding homelessness requires investigation that explains what homeless youth experience in their daily interactions with their environment.

Bearsley-Smith, Bond, Littlefield, and Thomas (2008) had views of homeless youth that were based on youth's individual prior experiences. Bearsley-Smith et al. believed that "subjective difficulties associated with youth homelessness may precede rather than stem from homelessness" (2008, p. 227). Bearsley-Smith et al. argued that homeless youth come with a psychosocial history of emotional and physical abuses, neglect, and parental drug abuse. Patterson and Tweed (2009), on the other hand, reviewed homeless youth studies from the perspective of hierarchy of needs. They interviewed 58 participants in shelters in Vancouver (British Columbia, Canada). Patterson and Tweed's survey tested social support (having a mentor, seeing a counsellor, etc.); services like transportation, dental care; and a third component that includes food, housing, and substance use treatment (2009). The finding was that "People who are homeless are not homogenous; some perceive a need for treatment of substance use, whereas others may not perceive such a need" (2009, p. 851). The variation of homeless youth seems to be immense. For instance, not all homeless youth have drug abuse problems; some might have taken the homeless identity and not cared so much about community services. Based on Patterson and Tweed's findings,

homeless youth have different constructs that define their motivation to transition off the streets or to remain there for a long period of time (2009). The suggestion from Patterson and Tweed is that not only should basic needs be considered when providing services to homeless youth. In this case, the view that homeless youth have of themselves is essential to consider when providing services for these population (2009).

Developing Frameworks

Siebel's (2010) project was to expand the view of the usual definition of homeless youth. In Siebel's review of the work conducted by Mallett, Rosenthal, Keys, and Averill (2010), she presented a framework of the forgotten humans. Siebel wanted focus on the fact that those who are presently homeless are not just missing a place to live, but are the forgotten ones. These homeless youth are part of the unwanted, unloved, uncared for, and rejected population (Siebel, 2011). The fact of that youth are living in a situation of homelessness seems to separate them from who they are as individual beings by taking away their voice. Homeless youth keep complying with institutional rules (2011). Siebel found that some youth become homeless by choice due to street drug use and spend a longer time on living on the street than others (Siebel, 2011). The other group of homeless youth addressed in Siebel's work is the group of youth who were forced to leave home. This group was able to develop meaningful relationships, like those with a boyfriend or girlfriend, once they moved to the street (Siebel, 2011). The group identified as experiencing problems with family were homeless only a short time and had plans to return home. This approach to

understanding homelessness in youth is based on the stories presented as their own life experiences.

Minnery and Greenhalgh (2007) agreed with the traditional approach to homeless that refers to structural and individual issues. This approach describes reasons for which youth become homeless, such as socio-structural causes or factors that reflect an individualist agency (Minnery & Greenhalgh, 2007). However, to Minnery and Greenhalgh, this traditional view has "led to a culture of homeless people being judged or tested and then found to be either deserving or undeserving for assistance" (2007, p. 650). In their view, neither of these approaches fully describes the complexity of homelessness because homelessness is a dynamic and possibly long term process (Minnery and Greenhalgh, 2007). In their view, this new conceptual approach allows for a much greater reflection on life events associated with care and support needs (2007). Minnery and Greenhalgh discussed another aspect: social exclusion. The above researchers stated that "rather than being linked to poverty or deviance, homelessness is increasingly being viewed as a component or expression of social exclusion" (2007, p. 645). Understanding homelessness as social exclusion requires providing for social integration. At the same time, it requires clarification of the factors that contribute to social exclusion. In this case, policy solutions, accommodation, social circumstances, and the welfare state become components of social integration, which opens the door for expanding the concept of homeless youth.

Horsell (2006) disagreed with the above perspective of social exclusion. Horsell noted that social exclusion discourse "has little explanatory power and is incapable of addressing the personal and structural components of people's experiences of disadvantage" (2006, p. 220). According to Horsell's analysis of structural context, a social exclusion perspective "highlights the personal and not structural features of social exclusion" (2006, p. 216). This view does not challenge the labour market for underpaying individuals, and these fundamental inequities remain unchallenged. Prosperity is created in capitalist societies, but not to the benefit of everyone (Horsell, 2006). At the individual level, Horsell noted that homelessness is "a condition people are in, not something done to them" (2006, p. 216). For Horsell, viewing social exclusion from perspectives of power and knowledge only has a rhetorical value. Horsell understands that the social exclusion position is appropriate for policy makers and service providers who follow those policies. In such a case, homeless youth becomes a social category that has to fit in the present social structure. From Horsell's perspective, homelessness is a measure against mainstream housing practices and goes back to the idea of associating those who deserve and those who do not deserve normal conditions in society (Horsell, 2006). Horsell stated that homelessness is a socially constructed term because it is compared with objective values like independence, vulnerability, and needs.

For David Farrugia (2011), understanding how homeless youth construct and narrate their view of who they are is essential if service providers have fulfilling

homeless youth's needs in mind. Youth's constructs and narratives provide insight into the nature of homelessness. Farrugia interviewed 20 participants who were between 16 and 24 years old (2011). Farrugia noted that homelessness is not a separate social category but "must be seen as part of the broader relations of inequality that structure the biographies of all contemporary young people" (Farrugia, 2011, p. 762). Farrugia claimed that homeless youth described their experiences in very individualized terms. Farrugia cited Perry, who argued that disadvantaged people are more dependent on institutions for their survival and "blame themselves for their inability to achieve milestones which they see normal" (Farrugia, 2011, p. 764). The points made by Farrugia were that homeless youth narrate their experience, which contributes to their identity in relation to the institutions they negotiate to survive in their environment (2011). This perspective seems reliable based on the view that any individual living in an individualized society forms her identity from subjective views and the definitions given to her by social structures and institutions.

Summary

I presented in this chapter different notions of homelessness in youth populations as well as some concerns, features, and difficulties of each set of criteria for homelessness in youth. In order to expand the concept of homelessness in youth, I offered perspectives that challenge definitions currently found in the literature. In general, homelessness in youth is addressed though discourse on causes for youth homeless. Other investigators of homelessness base their research on self-identification

or how the community responds to homelessness. However, the framework defined in this work entails moving from established definitions to a more complex investigation of this topic. For instance, some researchers pay attention to what homeless youth are currently experiencing while living in shelters, in transition houses, or sleeping in alleys or abandoned houses. Other investigators focus on different approaches like addressing personalities and conflict with families. Furthermore, some researchers want to match homeless situations with types of services offered in the community. Finally, I have presented perspectives that challenge the general view that whoever comes to live on the street is a homeless youth.

Conclusion

What has been presented in this chapter entails pressing concerns about, definitions of, and perspectives on homeless youth. Most researchers addressed in this chapter—if not all—agreed on the level of complexity of homelessness in youth. What researchers acknowledge is that all service providers do their work based on their understanding of homeless youth. Researchers such as Campbell and Durrah are clear on how difficult it is to find a universal definition of homelessness but hope that service providers will establish a more consistent system to offer solutions to the homeless youth problem.

On the other hand, some researchers are critical of services for homeless people like outreach and dropping programs. Those programs fall short of defining goals for homeless youth. For some service providers, the goal is to supplement basic necessities

like food, transportation, and short term shelter. However, in order to move forward, it seems crucial to take the problem into another dimension of discussion, one that will provide hope for those presently living on the street. Some weaknesses of programs that offer services to homeless youth are that they ignore the emotions and physical displacement of those they serve. The reason this is the case is that agencies do not take into consideration the complexity of homelessness as an issue. Consequently, service providers cover some needs but fall short of addressing other homeless concerns like health issues or wanting to go back home. For other youth on the streets, the homeless experience could simply be that they live a fragmented experience where they might not see a way out.

Chapter III: Factors Contributing to Homeless Youth

Abstract

Homeless youth vary in their experiences prior to being homeless. At the same time, experiencing life on the street also produces different connotations for each individual. Some youth will find resiliency as a coping skill to survive life on the street and be hopeful that life will change eventually. Some other youth lose faith in their family and social system and resolve not to engage in seeking support while patrolling the streets. Understanding factors that lead youth to be homeless provides clues about the support systems that might be available for this population as well as how homeless youth might benefit from them. In the present work, I review literature that presents essential factors that precede homelessness. My goal is to report outstanding factors that lead youth into homelessness and to take a critical look at how service providers understand reality lived by youth. Considering the diverse views and approaches to these problems, it seems important to show the gaps and close those differences between researchers' perspectives. I focus on factors like family environment, social structures, individual homelessness experiences, and agency positioned on what it means to be homeless.

Keywords: Family issues, mental health, foster care, social structure and agency

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I showed how researchers struggle to come up with a more general definition of homelessness in youth. Defining factors that contribute to homelessness can be equally hard to or even more complex than defining the term homelessness. Researchers on homeless youth agree on the fact that there is no one particular factor or situation that precipitates youth to become homeless. The absence of clear and particular factors that prompt youth to choose life on the street makes it more difficult to establish causation. In this work, I aim to identify events that precede homelessness in youth. These complex contributing factors to homelessness make it

difficult for researchers to come up with a fair and consistent empirical causation conclusion, but the above reasons are not the only reason for this limitation. Researchers also face funding constrains that limit the scope of their research. Current research in literature deals with a lack of a solid homeless theory as well as inconsistent definitions of the term homelessness, which adds to the research constrains.

Homelessness in youth is not connected to any one particular cause or contributing factor. Some researchers use the interrelated categories of emotional /behavioural problems (e.g., prostitution) or family related problems as a way of studying this problem and developing a general understanding of the topic. In this chapter, I review the findings from studies conducted on contributing factors that place youth at risk of being in a situation of homelessness. I identify three areas and I organize the ensuing discussion as follows: the first area is youth family issues such as conflict, family transitions, and physical and mental/emotional family abuse. The second area I identify deals with structural factors like poverty, government policy, and private agencies' systems. The third area I identify focuses on agency factors like youth dealing with mental health issues such as depression, suicidal thoughts, trauma, street-drug abuse and identity development. Adding to these factors are the effects or consequences of youth being homeless. Homeless youth display features particularly related to experiencing life on the street. Finally, I offer a summary of what has been discussed above and some concluding remarks on the issue of youth facing poverty and exclusion from society.

Contributing Factors for Homeless Youth

Family issues

Family conflicts vary according to culture. Thompson, Bender, Winsor, Cook, and Williams (2010) note that over time, there is an increase of verbal aggression and poor communication between parents and adolescents regarding the youth's basic needs growing up. Thompson et al. (2010) think conflict like verbal aggression makes finding a resolution difficult among family members (2010). Other forms of conflict are "parental substance use, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, school performance and personal style such as dress, hair color and piercing" (Thompson et al., 2010, p. 202). Some other family conflicts involve adolescents escaping domestic violence and ending up in worse situations on the street. McArthur, Zubrzycki, Rochester, and Thompson (2006) conduct studies on single parent fathers caring for their children. The above researchers report that single parent fathers in the study are homeless to begin with and socially invisible. As a consequence, "the relationship between situations of domestic violence and sole fathers' homelessness is less well understood" (McArthur, 2006, p. 291). It seems complex due to single parent fathers needing to negotiate low income houses and employment. Furthermore, personal problems like drug abuse or forms of physical disabilities could increase the chance that an adolescent will choose street life as opposed to remaining at home as a unified family.

Another factor that leads to homelessness is family separation. This life event is more difficult for males to handle. Mc Arthur et al. note that "separated men are also at heightened risk of substance abuse and mental health problems" (McArthur et al., 2006, p. 290). It seems that living with a single parent makes adolescents less emotionally stable and consequently more prone to anxiety. Zlotnick (2009) researches the link between homelessness and foster care in light of the role of parents and parenting. Zlotnick reports that as parents struggle to maintain their families while dealing with substance abuse, homelessness in parents is more likely to take place. Zlotnick says that "only 15% of minor-age children were living with their homeless parents" (Zlotnick, 2009, p. 319). Despite the fact that some homeless parents face mental illness and drug use problems, homelessness is the main reason their "children (75%) were living in foster care or other out-of-home placement" (Zlotnick, 2009, p. 319). The concept of homelessness and foster care seems to be understood by the above researchers as a transient living situation for homeless families. For instance, Zlotnick observes at care in foster homes is given until 19 years of age (2009). Zlotnick also claims that there are two commonalities between foster care and homeless youth: need for emotional support and improper care. Adolescents expect basic support from their families. However, support may not always be available. Consequently, an adolescent may become homeless soon after.

Johnson and Chamberlain (2008) note that homeless youth report that their sense of who they are can come from being drawn into a broad social unit. A sense of

belonging is an element that adolescents experience as missing from their family environment and this continues to be the case when they dwell on the street. Johnson and Chamberlain (2008) reason that youth involvement in the subculture of substance abuse is related to their search for a place to which they may belong. It seems to be a way to be validated and from which to draw identity. On a similar note, Hughes, Clark, Wood, Cakmak, Cox, ManInnis, Warren, Handrahan, and Broom (2010) conducted a study exploring the link between mental health issues, hope, and support satisfaction on 60 homeless youth. Hughes et al. (2010) reported that "most youth in our study left home because of trauma (family conflict and /or violence) and intolerable conditions— the street was viewed as their only/best alternative" (Hughes et al., 2010, p. 279). These researchers concluded that the positive outcome of a supportive family makes a huge impact of how youth develop their sense of belonging, identity, and hope for their future. Despite homelessness, the majority of youth from this group stayed in touch with their family, something consistent with other studies where youth displayed resiliency and hope for positive changes in their future (Hughes et al., 2010).

Structural factors

One important factor that leads to homelessness in youth within the foster-care system is age. Other factors are physical and verbal abuse, neglect, and lack of meaningful relationships with foster-care providers. Dworsky and Courtney (2009) researched youth in foster homes after the youth turned 19 years old. They found strong indicators in foster placements that youth may face homelessness in the future,

the same situations the youth faced when they were removed from their homes in the first place (Dworsky and Courtney, 2009). The quality of support offered at foster homes is another contributing factor to homelessness. The above researchers noted that 14% of interviewed youth reported being homeless after exiting care (Dworsky and Courtney, 2009). Dworsky and Courtney found that youth reported having received poor support from housing-related services. Dworsky and Courtney also found that "frequent placements changes are associated with an increase in the relative risk of becoming homeless" (Dworsky et al., 2013, p. 320). Similarly, Edidin, Ganim, Hunter, and Karnick (2011) found that homeless youth face barriers to the health-care system such as "inability to show evidence of a fixed permanent address, birth certificate, or photo identification" (Edidin et al., 2011, p. 364). An additional barrier is youth's refusal to seek professional help due to the difficulty of navigating the health-care system, a difficulty which increases frustration and disbelief in the support system (Edidin et al., 2011).

Agency factors

Johnson and Chamberlain (2008) use social selection and social adaptation models to investigate whether or not substance use precedes or follows homelessness. Social selection models frame substance use as the reason youth become homeless. Social adaptation models frame substance use as a consequence of homelessness (Johnson and Chamberlain, 2008). Johnson and Chamberlain found that "15% of the sample had substance abuse issues prior to becoming homeless for the first time" (2008, p. 347).

Based on the second model (social adaptation) Johnson and Chamberlain reported that "two thirds (66%) developed problematic substance use after they became homeless" (2008, p. 349). Substance use, then, seems to be a major problem for most youth once they become homeless. Substance use becomes, for some youth, a way of coping with issues like peer pressure to get involved in homeless subculture activities to have a sense of belonging (Johnson and Chamberlain, 2008). An important observation is the fact that "whether substance abuse precedes or follows homelessness, it typically locks people into the homeless population" (Johnson and Chamberlain, 2008, p. 351). Once youth are deep into addiction, homelessness will occur if most youth face problems like keeping a job, remaining housed, or being able to conform to social norms.

A slightly different approach comes from Toolis and Hammack (2015), who believe that youth can do better than remain homeless. Toolis and Hammack report case studies such as Orion's story that are good symbols of empowerment. They state that "Orion's story positioned becoming homeless as a way to reclaim the agency that he felt denied a home, where he took behavioral medication that made him feel like he was 'dead inside'" (Toolis and Hammack, 2015, p. 58). Feeling devalued at home could instill a desire to resist it, and consequently, youth could develop a positive attitude towards those adverse emotions (Toolis and Hammack, 2015). Miller, Donahue, Este, and Hofer (2004) interviewed homeless youth in Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada. Miller et al. (2004) stated that interviewed youth believed that their homelessness would pass and their situation would reverse, but they were not willing to go back to the life they had before

(Miller et al., 2004). Through their findings, it is clear that the situation these youth are in started as a gradual accumulation of negative factors like lack of independence, dropping out of school, drug abuse, and family conflict**.**

There are many services available for youth experiencing homelessness, but there are also barriers to accessing services like health care and housing. Mental health, identity, substance abuse, poverty and hope are some of the key factors that investigators like McArthur et al. (2006) have researched. Mc Arthur et al. (2006) presented Jonathan's story, a youth who was experiencing depression. Due to Jonathan's mental health, he was unable to cover the monthly rent, and his lack of financial means meant he was evicted from his rental apartment (McArthur et al., 2006). Some other youth with severe mental health issues do not bother seeking support anywhere else because they are out of touch with reality while experiencing psychosis. Most often, they choose to live in shelters and on the street.

Youth Experiencing Homelessness

Toolis and Hammack (2015) use narrative engagement, which refers to the process of how youth make meaning using an inherited meaning system, to understand the experience of homeless youth (2015). They stated that "stigma toward the unhoused is instantiated through the belief that homelessness is the result of personal failure rather that structural disadvantage" (Toolis and Hammack, 2015, p. 52). Miller et al. (2004) stated that in their research, many youth were employed but could not get a stable job or higher paying work because of lack of proper training (Miller et al., 2004).

Such youth find it difficult to afford any type of housing, even the cheapest form. It seems important to validate the fact that, while searching for stability, these youth are responding to their subculture acquired from street life. Youth in this study openly stated that they had had negative experiences with service providers, experiences that contributed to their fears of not getting more support from other service providers in their community (Miller et al., 2004).

Another common experience of homeless youth is violence and trauma. These two characteristics of the homeless youth experience are not a surprise for many researchers in this field, but what seems alarming for some investigators is that youth continue to be victims of violence and trauma. Edidin, Ganim, Hunter, and Karnik (2012) found that "homeless youth have an elevated risk of acquired traumatic brain injury" (Edidin et al., 2012, p. 360). This fact is associated with negative psychological behaviour such as anger, depression, and anxiety (Edidin et al., 2012). Other medical health concerns are asthma, pneumonia, and sexual transmitted diseases, which are part of the experience of living on the street. Thompson et al. (2010) stated that "adolescents' family environment is a critical factor in the development of depression among youths" (Thompson et al., 2010, p. 195). Depression is a common mental-health issue found in homeless youth. It is attributed to high levels of family conflict and abuse while still living at home (Thompson et al., 2010). On the other hand, victimization does not end at home. Youth continue experiencing the same or worse types of abuse on the street as well.

Summary

For young people, having appropriate support growing up, developing good relationship with close family members, and experiencing a good sense of belonging is essential during the stages of development. However, homeless youth experience neglect, abuse, lack of emotional care, poverty, mental health issues, substance abuse, and family conflict. I have discussed a range of factors that contribute to homelessness in youth. As stated above, family issues have negative impact on youth who face homelessness. There are single parents who live in poverty and cannot take care of their children even if they wish the best for their sons or daughters. Poverty is a huge factor that precipitates youth becoming homeless. This chapter also addresses the concept of agency, which is understood as youth taking control over their actions. Another factor of potential homelessness in youth is the use of drugs in the family, something that disrupts family ties and leads to a loss of respect between adolescents and parents. Severe mental health issues in the family also produce negative impacts on adolescents, like improper care and lack of guidance in personal development. For some youth on the street, neglect and rejection is reflected on youth behaviour as self-harm and anger. The same applies to the mental state of these youth when disclosing suicidal ideation and hopelessness.

For some youth, foster homes become a factor for homelessness. Some youth are placed in foster-care systems that do not support personal development towards independence. Upon aging out, they see no future for themselves and decide to

become homeless. Some researchers like Dworsky and Courtney (2009) question whether or not youth in foster care should be considered homeless. The argument for this view is that youth do not received a decent level of care from foster parents. There is a strong view from Drury (2008) that services provided by hospitals, and foster homes and group homes according to Dworsky and Courtney (2009), are not supportive of basic skill development or human growth for youth. Moreover, Heinze, Jozefowicz, Toro, and Blue (2012) argue that there is no indication that foster placements facilitate successful transition towards independent living. Consequently, some youth rebel against family structures or rebel against social structures. The lack of appropriate care in general place youth in a position to choose street life. As Miller et al. (2004) stated, "the feelings about their situation were generally negative" (p. 747). Some youth still look towards independence and having their own place to live.

Limitations

For this chapter, I selected literature pertaining to factors that contribute to homelessness in youth. In this regard, I provided a classification of general factors involved in leading youth to become homeless. The scope of the literature review leaves out chains of events that link youth to more detrimental behaviours like prostitution, drug use, and human trafficking. Perhaps cluster analysis of these factors could enhance the presentation and is an alternative approach for future reviews on homeless youth research.

Conclusion

It is clear based on the above information that there is not one particular factor that determines homelessness in adolescents. In this work, I identified factors that indicate deficits in a youth's growing environment. One event could lead to another to the detriment of the youth's wellbeing. Adolescents, whether we like it or not, are at risk of becoming homeless due to their age and stage of physical, mental, and emotional development. Adolescence is a time for youth to expect the most intense care from parents and service providers and social structure. One particular factor that places youth at risk of being homeless is poverty. Minimum wages, being underpaid, and being jobless are part of being poor because social and economic factors carry so much power over family members. All the factors involved in homelessness do not seem to indicate direct cause, so causation should not haunt the mind of investigators. It does not seem feasible to specify factors as causes for homelessness. The root of the problem of homeless seems to be lack of meeting basic needs, lack of emotional support, and lack of fulfilling goals in youth life. In this regard, the future for adolescents living on the street is dark and painful. New approaches to homelessness could be more inclusive by adding government policy intentions and new social dimensions of integration.

Chapter IV: Factors Contributing to Exiting Street Life

Abstract

Transitioning, maturing, and changing are some the characteristics of some homeless youth who are trying to exit the streets. For some homeless youth, continuing with street life is not an option anymore. They have been there too long and it is time to explore changing those life patterns. Once again, there is not a singular pathway for homeless youth to follow when moving off the street. However, there is research on factors that support exiting homeless life. For instance, taking responsibility and trusting that things can change for the best is a sign of maturity. Renewing contact and communication with family members is another motivator to change a youth's present circumstances. In an earlier chapter, family members' conduct was identified as a potential reason for leaving home earlier in the adolescent phase. Poverty is another factor that plays a double role in homelessness; poverty has been identified as a prominent reason why some youth leave their initial home environment and a reason for exiting the streets. Identity and links to service providers are considered important factors that are being discussed in this work.

Keywords: *Discrimination, Stigma, Peers, Family, Agency, Hope*

Introduction

Taking steps towards exiting life on the street does not appear to be an easy task for some homeless youth. Findings from this study indicate that motivation comes from two levels: inner motivation and external support. In the case of inner motivation, the impulse to change is originated by the development of hope. Youth on streets come to see that a different, meaningful life is possible. Consequently, youth start trusting service providers who can help with their plans of leaving their situation of homelessness for good. Exiting homelessness is like an awakening to another reality.

For instance, some youth will start seeing the value of changing perhaps start feeling tired of the same daily routine. Other street-stranded youth may not see the benefits of going back home or to a stable house. Similarly, integration to the work force is not important while still living on the street; some youth seem unmotivated to work. In this chapter, I will examine factors that assist youth to end their homeless life. My goal for this chapter is to convey understanding and challenge the view that homeless youth exist as a consequence of personal failure.

In order to do the above, I have gathered select articles in support of my thesis. In this literature review, I will defend the claim that youth reflect on their homeless experience and contemplate what would be different if they changed their present routine with the goal of leaving homelessness behind. Youth understand that exiting homelessness is challenging because support is needed from their social system. In this chapter, I focus on factors that support youth through the process of exiting homelessness. I will begin by providing an overview of what youth have experienced as homeless. Secondly, I will discuss how families, prosocial peers, and social services are part of the support for getting youth off the street. Third, I will discuss how adverse situations like poverty turn into a factor that supports exiting homelessness. Finally, I will introduce self-perception by youth as agents of change. Adding to this framework, I will develop a view on how youth come from hopelessness to believe that change is possible by walking a path that leads to social and financial stability. I will also offer a summary and conclusion on factors that support youth changing their lives for good.

Wherever they go to live (back home or to their own place), these youth will experience a different lifestyle.

Overview of Life on the Street

Discrimination

The reasons youth decide to end an unpleasant life on the streets are not disconnected from the fact that hard life becomes unbearable. For instance, Milburn, Ayala, Rice, Batterham, and Rotheram-Borus (2006) noted from their findings that discrimination against homeless people is perceived by homeless youth as intolerable behaviour (Milburn et al., 2006). Researchers also found that newly homeless youth (6 months of street life) continuously report that negative experiences on the streets amplify existing problems—for example, once on the street, "adolescents were categorized into groups by sexual orientation" (Milburn et al., 2006, p. 665). Sexual orientation leads to a problem when being categorized due to sexual orientation. Other newly homeless youth who exited the streets reported discrimination not for their sexual orientation but for being homeless (Milburn et al., 2006). According to the above study, youth reports on discrimination fluctuate after 6 months on the streets. One reason might be that youth get used to harassment and do not bother reporting any more. Another reason could be that youth enter a more stable housing situation like a foster home and do not experience high levels of harassment any longer. An observation from this study is that it only relates to two forms of discrimination:

"harassment and bias-related victimization" (Milburn et al., 2006, p. 668). Researchers

are not entirely sure about why this fluctuation occurs, so it opens up for more research

investigation on this theme.

Stigma

One of the challenges homeless youth face is stigmatization. Toolis and

Hammack (2015) stated that reports from homeless people of stigmatization and

discrimination are very high among lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (Toolis and

Hammack, 2015) individuals. According the definition, stigma is a "'deeply discrediting

and undesired differentness' from social norms that places one in a subordinate

position" (Toolis and Hammack, 2015, p. 51). Homeless youth seem to be relegated to

social isolation and have fewer opportunities to access services in the community. The

above researchers also pointed out that these negative views on homeless youth have a

major impact on identity development. There are mental health concerns such as low

self-esteem and feelings of alienation, helplessness, and hopelessness (Toolis and

Hammack, 2015). The social perception of homeless is that youth are "unmotivated,"

"drug dealers," and "unruly," but, despite this negative view, some youth decide to find

community and self-worth in their life as homeless individuals (Toolis and Hammack,

2015).

Social organization

Most of the research conducted on youth homelessness is focused on the factors that motivate youth to become homeless, such as previous negative life experiences at home. However, youth are able to reverse negative experiences on the streets, which I explore as motivators to exit life on the street. For instance, caring families, prosocial peers, and social services have proven to be factors that help youth to exit homelessness. Youth realize that they cannot live according to those negative events. Such events impact those who have been homeless for 6 months to 2 years.

Family

It is a fact for some homeless youth that family issues like violence or drug use motivate them to leave home and become homeless. At the opposite end of the spectrum, some street youth make an effort to re-engage with their families. Research conducted by Mayock, Corr, and O'Sullivan (2010) focussed on family connection as a factor for exiting homelessness. The above researchers stated, "this research identifies maternal social support as a 'striking' predictor of exiting" (Mayock et al., 2010, p. 392). This is a factor not fully explored as a predictor of exiting homelessness. It seems that no matter how difficult family relationships happen to be, there is a mental and emotional link that attaches youth to their parents or family members. Another point made by Mayock et al. (2011) is that family support includes "concrete support, emotional support, advice support and esteem support" (Mayock et al., 2010, p. 396).

From the researchers' perspective, the above support mechanism is valuable and important for youth to leave the streets. Some youth living on the streets seem to search of meaningful support even when they know that they are deeply immersed in a detrimental street environment.

Milburn, Rice, Rotheram-Borus, Mallett, Rosenthal, Batterham, May, Witkin, and Duan (2009) concentrated their work on four levels of social organization: family, peers, social services, and formal institutions. The above researchers suggested that contact and support from family increase family attachment, which may impact homeless youth to exiting their situation of homelessness (Milburn et al., 2009). An interesting finding from the above researchers is that "baseline maternal support was significantly associated with the odds of exiting homelessness (OR51.26, po.01)" (Milburn et al., 2009, p. 775). It seems that homeless youth are almost always missing important connections, whether at home or on the streets, but once these positive connections are made, they are enough to motivate changes in a youth's life.

Peers

Milburn et al. (2009) commented on Rice et al.'s (2008) idea of antisocial and deviant peers impeding the process of some youth getting off the streets, but also note that peers can offer positive support to those who want to change their life. For instance, usually youth on the street are prone to associate with youth who are involved in delinquent activities, which bring more trouble to newly homeless youth. On the other hand, youth who are attending school, in the work force, and have positive

relationships are likely to have positive influence on adolescents who are excluded from main stream society (Milburn et al., 2009). Some youth develop insights about their personal situation. For instance, Mayock et al. (2010) reported the words of one interviewee: "At the time I thought they (old friends) were the best thing since sliced bread and everything was brilliant but looking back on it now it wasn't…we did terrible things together and were bad influences, all of us were bad influences on each other" (Mayock et al., 2010, p. 397). On the other hand, it can be argued that prior to these insightful moments, peers usually see each other as family and support each other negatively and prolong their stay on the streets. In the above case, the youth left some of the street activities behind in favour of positive change.

Social services

Some researchers question the quality of services available to youth in their homeless community. Milburn et al. (2009) are not the exception. From their findings, they noted that effective services produce good outcomes for youth exiting the streets (Milburn et al., 2009). Quality of services for the above researchers means the "use services that reduce family conflict or provide educational assistance would have greater odds of exiting homelessness than their counterparts who use services that provide for subsistence needs alone" (Milburn et al., 2009, p. 767). Milburn et al. (2009) seemed to be critical of the types of services for homeless youth that only support youth to continue in their survival mode. Effective services for the above researchers are positive only for the first 6 weeks that newly homeless youth appear on

the streets (Milburn et al., 2009). Besides meeting this timeframe, services should not be offered far away from a young person's family environment because youth disconnect themselves from their families and peers (Milburn et al., 2009). At the same time, Milburn et al. (2009) expressed concern that community services are less effective when newly homeless youth are kept in the loop of homelessness, in which case they have no immediate plans to integrate socially.

Housing

Research done on housed youth presents a dilemma: some youth report a high level of stability due to having their own place to live. On the other hand, some investigators on homelessness find minimum levels of community integration. Researchers like Patterson, Currie, Rezansoff, and Somers (2014) reported from their findings that "a number of participants described feeling proud of their home and, as a result, had reconnected with family" (Patterson et al., 2014, p. 3). Other youth also reported that being housed gave them motivation to either go back to school or get paid work. Some other youth reported feeling less depressed and hopeless, a change that had positive impact in supporting further change in their future. Contrary to this are the findings from Kidd, Karabanow, Hughes, and Frederick (2013). These researchers explored the lives of youth in the process of exiting homelessness. One of the challenges that youth face is psychological integration into the community. Kidd et al. (2013) stated that "youth not living in supported contexts (living independently

individually or in groups) reported poorer community engagement, quality of life and mental health" (Kid et al., 2013, p. 1037).

Housing seems to bring challenges for youth who were homeless to adapt to a new form of life. Drury's (2008) research on 60 chronically homeless individuals who were newly discharged from hospitals depicted the following information. There is growing interest from private and government sectors to house homeless people; however, housing homeless people without support services is very ineffective (Drury, 2008). Drury wrote that homeless people need time and support to make the transition into permanent housing (Drury, 2008). Besides that, Drury found that "their transition from the street was incomplete and their acculturation to homelessness continued because their fundamental situation remained unchanged" (Drury, 2008, p. 100). It seems that it is not enough to talk about a safe environment for youth to succeed in getting off the streets. A youth's experience on the street does not go away fast enough to produce immediate changes. Raleigh-Duroff (2004) researched factors that supported youth exiting homelessness in Seattle, Washington. The findings were that formerly homeless youth would claim that they were "'building skills in preparation for working and living in transitional housing" (Raleigh-Duroff, 2004, p. 576). Housing programs should offer a structured environment in which youth practise life skills that are essential for changing in their lives (Raleigh-Duroff, 2004).

Agency

Some researchers view homeless youth as almost a product of their social structure. It is clear that any form of mentorship and social services play an important role in motivating youth to leave the street life. However, it is also clear from literature that how homeless youth perceive their experiences as homeless individuals affects their potential to create change for themselves. Toolis and Hammack (2015) reported that young people's narratives demonstrate that homeless youth have the ability to generate something better for them. This view is in line with the negative position adopted by youth who conclude that nobody cares for them and take their destiny into their own hands. Likewise, Parsell, Tomaszewski, and Phillips (2014) found that homeless people were capable of assessing their homeless situation and visualizing supportive alternatives to change their street problems. For instance, the above researchers referred to a youth who shared how he found a way out of homelessness: "he attributed exiting homelessness to the practices of outreach workers that enabled him to alter his self-perceptions and self-worth" (Parsell et al., 2014, p. 311). It shows how this particular youth did not compromise his sense of freedom and perception of his own reality; at the same time, the support of outreach workers nurtured the understanding of his situation. Following a specific program structure was not important for him when social services were not matching his needs.

Another point made by Parsell et al. (2014) was that youth refuse services because of negative past experiences with service providers, but later on, the same

youth change their view from blaming outreach workers or service providers to seeing their own negative perception of society as a barrier to taking full advantage of the services available (Parsell et al., 2014). Sustaining housing is viewed as a personal choice. Some youth reported that they were too old to be on the streets or stated that health reasons were strong motivators to stay housed (Parsell et al., 2014). Adding to the sense of personal choice, the above researchers reported that some "participants understood that they were required to engage in behavioral change in order to realize their housing aspirations" (Parsell et al., 2014, p. 314). The participants referred to above agreed to alter their behaviours and do anything else that would keep them housed. Overall, the sense of agency based on life experience and the desire to change allow youth to change their lives. These youth leave behind negative experiences as barriers in order to produce the desired change for themselves.

Poverty and Hope

Besides the hardships of enduring life on the streets, poverty is a particular component of homeless in youth. Toolis and Hammack (2015) reported the words of one of their interviewees (Alejandro), who compared himself to members of a higher social class. Alejandro's story demonstrated that some youth are financially supported by their families. They finish college, get jobs, purchase fancy cars and things look so great (Toolis and Hammack, 2015). According to Alejandro, "it doesn't go for the people at the bottom. Youth don't get that... you gotta dig for the things you want" (Toolis and Hammack, 2015, p. 56). This was the sentiment expressed by a number of formerly

homeless youth like Alejandro who experienced isolation while living on the street. However, he transformed his experience into strength and attributes exiting homelessness to the good choices he made (Toolis and Hammack, 2015). Lincoln is another youth interviewed by Toolis and Hammack (2015) who, in his narrative, expressed his reality. He said, "I don't have a cell phone, I don't have money… I don't have anyone to cut my hair… and I didn't have money for clothes" (Toolis and Hammack, 2015, p. 59). His comment indicates that such experiences were left behind and no longer a barrier to his future goals.

According to some researchers, hope is a very important factor for youth who are homeless. Releigh-DuRoff described hope as "a power within the self to move beyond the present situation for a better tomorrow" (Releigh-DuRoff, 2004, p. 562). Hope is not an empty concept for youth who prefer to escape homelessness. For instance, one youth reported that working a paid job gave him the hope that exiting the streets was possible (Releigh-DuRoff, 2004). Releigh-DuRoff (2004) found that many street youth hope that their dreams can be realized. Hope is a feeling that makes youth believe that changing one's lifestyle is possible.

Summary

In this work, I introduced factors that support youth to exit the streets in order to help them live a more stable life. Within the context of exploring these factors, the idea was raised that there is not one particular way for youth to exit homelessness. In this chapter, I provided an overview of how youth experience life on the street. The two

main concerns were discrimination and social stigma that youth endure while living on the streets. Youth carry with them the stigma of being perceived as passive consumers incapable of sustaining financial or housing stability. Some youth wear this stigma, leading them to have low levels of self-esteem. For other youth, stigma and discrimination provide an opportunity to exercise resiliency. On a social level, youth deal with family, peers, and social services. Research shows that family dynamics motivate youth to become homeless. Despite this, there is literature that supports that family is an important factor in supporting abandonment of street life. The same idea applies to peers in the life of homeless youth. Youth have to make a conscious decision to leave behind those peers that engaged in criminal activities. Having done so, they also need to find prosocial peers who support a more mainstream social life. Social services play a major role for youth in the precarious situation of homelessness. It is important to see that youth distinguish between good services and those services that are not satisfying the youth's needs.

In this chapter, I also explored how housing becomes a factor in supporting stability for youth. Having a place to live is only half of the equation for some youth experiencing difficulties on the street. In this work, I have shown that once youth are housed, they sometimes give up their own places. The reason is that youth are not financially stable enough to keep a place independently. In cases like these, subsidized housing comes in handy for youth to sustain their own places. It is also important to teach life skills to youth who never had the opportunity to function in regular society.

It is not easy to explain the determination of some individuals to exit the streets through the concept of human agency. Youth come to realize they have to take the lead on creating changes for themselves. For some youth, service providers seldom matched their needs; consequently, they began to discriminate between services that worked in their favour and the ones that did not. For most youth at this stage of action, taking the next steps is like awakening to a future. It is like seeing the horizon or the possibility of having a different life. Finally, this work presented a balanced perspective on poverty and its acceptance as a fact of life. Poverty, for most of homeless youth, is a given. Poverty was, in some cases, the motivation for living a homeless life. At the same time, homeless youth experience life below the poverty level. Poverty becomes undesirable, a motivator to quit life on the streets. Some youth go from helplessness to hopefulness, from despair to having a more positive view of their future. Some youth believe that without hope, it is not possible to create and see their dreams realized. These are the main points I presented in this work.

Conclusion

The question of what exactly determines when youth are ready to exit street life is far from being exhaustively answered by research. Within the complexity of social variables and individuality, there are no clear pathways to exiting homelessness. However, the factors presented above are strong enough to direct homeless youth to change their lives. Family values and support are important for homeless youth who are in the process of personal development. Life skills within the family and the community

are the foundation for handling difficult life events. Youth cannot be seen as detached from the social context, regardless of their social condition at the present time. Case studies support that without proper social or family support, youth turn to other forms of survival that are detrimental to their wellbeing. It is important to validate the fact that individuals are not alone in their social journey. The responsibility also falls on every member of society to support stability for adolescents, who are learning about their environment and conceptualizing their own place in the social world.

Chapter V: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

In my thesis, I conducted literary research on youth who are homeless. In the present chapter, I will address the significance and purpose of this thesis. The scope of my study was limited by three questions. The first question was this: What constitutes being a homeless youth? My hope was to find a concrete definition of what being a homeless person entails; instead, I found a variety working definitions. The second question was this: What factors contribute to youth becoming homeless? Again, my expectation was to find a direct cause of homelessness in youth; however, I found no direct causation. Instead, I found correlation between individuals and their current environment. A neglected youth might choose life on the street as opposed to staying at home. The third question was this: What factors contribute to youth exiting homelessness? I expected that the answer to this last question would be services that target the reality youth face when trying to exit the streets. The service interventions addressed in this study were not intended to end homelessness but to support the immediate needs of youth. Also, the findings in this study depicted a variety of researchers' position on the three questions mentioned above. In this chapter, I will provide a conclusion (summary) of the findings from this review as well as some recommendations for future directions on supporting youth to exit homelessness.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the lives of homeless youth. With this in mind, this work contributes to raising awareness of the importance of guiding youth toward exiting life on the streets. Such awareness is directed to private and government agencies offering services to homeless youth. Adding to the awareness, this study aims to bring motivation and understanding to professionals in the social services to produce services that support youth exiting the streets. Providing services to youth in question is not the only thing that matters; those services also need to match youth's important needs. My aim with this study was to gain insight about the value of services for youth living on the street. It is the meaning of those services that makes a difference to them. For instance, for some youth on the street, it is just a matter of surviving; for others, exiting the street is more important than only surviving. Developing a perspective of how youth view themselves directly from their experiences of homelessness is one more goal of mine in this study. Taking seriously what homeless youth experience and think extends the view of service providers on the potential individuals have to generate change for themselves.

My literary review relates to what youth think of themselves as well as how they understand the services provided to them. It seems that a great amount of research conducted on homelessness is strongly influenced by policy and funding programs. These programs turn out to offer quick solutions to long term problems youth face on the street. Giving solutions to immediate needs can be understood as part of the

process of youth exiting the streets. In this study, I argue that the barriers youth encounter are not due to their own choices, but instead are placed in front of them by their social context. In any case, this study contributes to the development of a view that comes from firsthand experiences of youth. My findings reflect what homeless youth say about their own experiences living on the street. Youth perceive and analyse the type of services offered to them in the past and present. The present study shows that the nature, capacity, and ability of youth to construe their own way out of homelessness has not been appreciated by service providers as it needs to be. In my findings, I show that individuals are not detached from their environment. For instance, homeless youth need supportive services like sustainable housing accompanied with life skills and education. As a contribution, I show that the roles and responsibilities of youth and the link between meaningful resources and self-determination are important factors to change their situation of homelessness. This study points at the importance for youth to have a space and a voice to express their truth. Some homeless youth need and want to reinvest trust in service providers to work towards social integration.

Summary

In this study, I assessed three questions. The first question was this: What criteria do individuals need to meet in order to qualify as homeless? The significance of this question is connected to the type of services homeless youth receive. The way homelessness is defined determines the type of services this population receives. I found a variety of working definitions of homelessness. I discovered that a universal

definition of homelessness is almost impossible. The reason is that what we know about homeless youth is just a collection of attributes and characteristics assigned to youth by the simple fact that they are living on the street. They all have different family backgrounds, environments, and reasons for living on the street. It is clear from the findings that it is difficult or almost impossible for researchers to put all these variables together into one definition. For some researchers, living in a shelter is enough to qualify as homeless. Some other investigators oppose this idea, stating that as long as they have a place to live, they are not homeless. However, even if youth have temporary shelter, it does not reflect on whether they search for a permanent place of their own.

Other positions on the definition of homelessness connect to the concept of immediacy. Some researchers define homeless youth as circumstantial. For instance, those youth who spend the night anywhere but in formal, habitable places are homeless. This is very controversial because under certain circumstances, anyone could sleep anywhere that is not safe. This is a serious concern for some researchers, who pointed out that such a narrow definition of homelessness does not take into account an individual's ability to return to the social or family setting. Other definitions by researchers came from a framework of individual decisions or choices to be homeless. Researchers like Toolis and Hammack (2015) reported findings that stretch the concept of homeless youth into a negative view. For instance, anybody who believes that youth living on the street are a problem to society forgets that the behaviour and decisions of

youth do not come from their family or school environment only. I believe that there is not one particular circumstance that shapes a youth's behaviour. What homeless youth know about themselves as individuals does not come from one place in their social environment, but from different social and family learnings. I argue in this study that individuals do not live in isolation, and the above context is essential to understanding homeless youth.

The second question I researched was this: What factors contribute to youth becoming homeless? There is a solid body of research regarding factors that contribute to homelessness. I found that family problems put pressure on youth to leave their home and begin to wonder where to go. For instance, domestic violence like physical, verbal, and sexual abuse can motivate youth to abandon their families. I found that parents with addiction issues contribute to neglect of youth's basic needs for support and frustrations coming from youth. Parents who are homeless themselves contribute to the perception of some youth that homelessness is a way of life. This perception does not seem to offer hope to homeless youth about their future. I also found in the literature that having parents with disabilities who struggle financially is yet another factor that influences youth to live on the street. Another factor is separated or divorced parents. For some youth, living with one parent is not the best alternative because one parent cannot provide all the personal and emotional support needed for their development. Adolescents normally explore a sense of belonging at home, school, or

any other social place. Researchers like Morag McArthur et al. see the displaced family as a reason for youth to perceive themselves as not belonging to the rest of the family.

The other component of this second question is the structural factor. Some youth are legally or forcefully remove from their parents and become part of the ministry of social services. This implies that some youth are taken to foster homes. My findings indicated that youth in foster care were discharged from the support system at 19 years of age. Some youth from the group studied became homeless. Interestingly, the reasons they were removed from their family homes were the same as the ones that put them on the street as homeless youth when turning 19 years old. For example, they were not being supported emotionally or towards future goals. This was one of the reasons some researchers addressed in this study believe that youth in foster care qualify as homeless. The same researchers believe that youth in foster care receive minimal support and develop almost no connection with foster parents. Foster homes are not better than family homes in terms of neglecting immediate needs. Youth are skeptical about requesting help once they live on the streets. They learn not to trust anybody due to negative experiences at foster homes.

The last component of this question is the concept of agency, meaning individuals taking initiative to improve their lives. Youth on the street are normally distracted by experiences with drug addiction and/or mental health problems. Researchers in this present work reported that only 15% of the homeless population reported illegal drug use prior to becoming homeless. Drug use was understood by some researchers, like

Jennifer P. Eddin et al. (2011), as cover for other personal issues like a lack of sense of belonging and peer pressure to be part of the homeless group. One the consequences from the use of addictive drugs is that youth cannot maintain a job and, therefore, are not able to sustain housing on their own. Another important point from this study is the lack of education at the very young age. Besides other street problems, some youth are not employable due to lack of social and technical skills. For some researchers, like Morag McArthur et al. (2006), the implication of having no skills and living under precarious circumstances is that homelessness becomes an alternative form of life for those adolescents. Some youth choose the streets as a place to live based on mental health experiences like trauma, depression, or Schizophrenia; others search for freedom. Unfortunately, this population is so vulnerable to any form of abuse by anyone that the street becomes a worse place to live than previous shelters or safe homes. Youth suffering mental health issues have self-identity problems due to cognitive impairment.

The last question in this study was this: What factors contribute to exiting homelessness. My findings on this question indicated that youth cannot do it alone. Youth might have the will to change, but they are all disconnected from the core of social norms. They need to regain their trust in service providers and move into a new phase of life. Research conducted on newly homeless youth reported discrimination as one of the reasons youth decide to leave street life. At times, it was due to sexual orientation; other times it was because they were experiencing homelessness. The

general feeling of these youth is that they are not welcomed by mainstream society. Newly homeless youth also report issues with stigma for being drug users, unmotivated to work, and in trouble with the law. Many youth from this group reported to researchers addressed in this study that they could not handle it anymore because no services were available for them the way regular citizens access services. However, after 6 months being on the street, the same youth reported that they were beginning to adapt to the negative aspects of life on the street.

Factors that contribute to exiting homelessness are family connection, prosocial peers, and linking to social services. This present study reported on youth who, while on the street, kept some connection or reconnected with their families. This was the main force that motivated them to end their homelessness. A couple of reports, like that of Milburn et al. (2009) and Mayock et al. (2010), stated that the maternal link was a major predictor for youth exiting homelessness. When youth and family members work their relationship out, they can leave their differences behind. Another factor is prosocial peers. There is not much data reported about prosocial peers supporting other youth in trouble. However, in this present study, youth reported that they realized that those peers on the street were not the best friends they could have. There are peers who offer a place to live or employment support for those in transition from the street to a more stable house.

In this study, I also reported on how social services make a difference for youth exiting the street. The quality of services and the purpose of these services can greatly

impact as they youth transition from homelessness. Youth approach support services just to continue in their survival mode. There are other service providers for whom the goal is to support youth leaving the homeless environment, but I have not found much of this in the literature. Milburn Rotheram-Borus, Mallett, Rosenthal, Batterham, May, Witkin, and Duan (2009) are strong critics of systems that provide services for youth to keep on going with their homelessness. However, the above researchers argued that youth could receive services near their own communities and not where the homeless environment is located. In this present study, some youth clearly stated that without those services oriented to transition from homelessness, they would never make it. Another finding from this current study was about the concept of housing. Housing continues to be the most positive aspect for youth in transition from homelessness. Youth feel motivated to change when they get a job, go back to school, and search for peers who are more established in their environment. On the other hand, some youth have a place to live but they feel isolated, have no positive connections with anyone, and are depressed and immerse in drug use. These youth express their negative feelings about housing. According to them, housing is not enough if they have no support to leave behind their old street behaviour. These youth's aim is to have meaningful connections with members in their community. Otherwise, they likely will end up back on the street due to lack of support from service providers.

The last factor in this study is the concept of agency. Youth are able to produce changes necessary to experience a different lifestyle. Youth are able and have the

capacity to assess their environment. Youth also seem to understand what is needed at the time to produce those changes. Youth begin to work and develop trust in their relationships with community members. Through narratives from youth about their experiences on the street, they are able to express how bad it was homelessness was for them. The outreach workers who are connected to youth on the street are the key for youth to succeed in getting out of their street problems. Those outreach workers provide for these youth with what is needed to reintegrate to society. Youth know about social expectations for them to change their behaviours and they are willing to go through this process. It is important to say that hope that life can be different is motivation for some youth.

Recommendations

Studies like the one conducted by Chery Zlotnick (2009) show that some factors that motivate youth to become homeless are the same factors that support exiting homelessness. For instance, homeless youth experience abuse on the street, isolation, and lack of personal and emotional support. Youth experienced these events at home prior to homeless life, and now they are tired of experiencing the same thing while living on the street. Definitions of homelessness are limited and prevent the inclusion of fundamental support services to mitigate the needs of homeless youth. Current services that cover immediate needs have been around for some time, missing the long-term goal, which is social integration. I believe my research can have positive impact on

social service providers, policy makers, and counsellors. Service providers can begin by coordinating services that facilitate social integration. For instance, immediate needs are to be covered with the goal of connecting youth to advance towards stabilization. This stabilization involves housing that offers situations in which personal and social skills can be developmented. In such cases, this new stage involves development of self-esteem and responsibility in the community taken by youth. Policy makers can develop programs based on the theory that youth are still at the stage of personal development. Youth are capable of leading their lives if there is a level of social inclusion. Youth participation is essential for effectiveness of services for homeless youth. Sharing youth narratives can enhance future programs. Understanding homelessness in youth is not about giving youth a homelessness identity but entering their reality. Youth perceive themselves as displaced, and homelessness is an alternative for them to continue with life.

Counseling marginalized youth is not a simple matter for professionals in the field. Again, there are a number of problems that youth face such as identity development, loss, and suicidal issues. Under those circumstances, counsellors could implement group counselling to create a space for youth to put out their emotions. Good outcome measures in this case are events that support the emotional stability of youth. Youth benefit from knowing that there is a safe place to express emotional concerns; besides that, they will know that they are not the only ones in the process of strengthening their soul. I believe that some homeless youth perceive service providers as people who

have let them down too many times in the past. Counsellors need to gain youth's trust by allowing youth's full participation in the counselling process. Counsellors are in a good position to avoid underestimating youth's readiness for counselling support. Youth should be free to express what is working and what it is not for them. My last recommendation is to avoid conforming to one theory about homelessness in youth; there is no logic available for expressing emotional pain. Therefore, it is important to view homeless youth as the drivers in the process of healing their emotions. In all fairness, this review study covers as much ground as the three research questions allow. My hope is that this work evokes a much wider perspective on the issue of homeless youth.

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