Exploring the nexus between homelessness among indian children and adolescents and psychic illnesses: A comprehensive analysis

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ABSTRACT:

This article undertakes a rigorous examination of the intricate relationship between homelessness among Indian children and adolescents and the development of psychic illnesses. Beyond the immediate deprivation of shelter, homelessness entails the loss of essential rights and opportunities, including access to housing, healthcare, civic and democratic participation. The article navigates through the complexities of causes, consequences, and the profound interconnections between trauma and homelessness. Utilizing a serious and scientific approach, it aims to unravel the multifaceted nature of homelessness, posing critical questions and providing insights into potential solutions. The study also sheds light on the dire scenario of homelessness in India, with an estimated 1.8 million affected individuals, emphasizing the urgency of evidence-based interventions. The exploration of psychic trauma as a consequence of homelessness, particularly among children and adolescents, adds a critical dimension to our understanding. The article concludes with a set of comprehensive recommendations to address the root causes and mitigate the pervasive impact of homelessness and associated psychic illnesses.

KEYWORDS: Homelessness, Psychic Illnesses, India, Children, Adolescents.

INTRODUCTION

Homelessness represents a pervasive societal issue transcending the mere lack of housing. This article undertakes a serious and scientific exploration of the complex relationship between homelessness among Indian children and adolescents and the emergence of psychic illnesses. Beyond the immediate consequences, the study aims to dissect the intricate web of causes, consequences, and the interlinked nature of trauma and homelessness. (Figure 1).

WHAT IS HOMELESSNESS: Defined as the absence of a fixed, regular, and adequate residence, homelessness extends beyond physical shelter deprivation. It is a result of systemic or societal barriers, encompassing economic, societal, and individual challenges such as financial, mental, cognitive, behavioral, or physical issues, along with racism and discrimination (Belanger YD, 2014).

CAUSES OF HOMELESSNESS: Homelessness seldom has a singular cause but is often the cumulative impact of various factors. Structural factors, including poverty,

discrimination, lack of low-cost housing, and the effect of colonialism on Indigenous Peoples, contribute extensively. systems failures and character and relational factors further exacerbate the difficulty.

CONSEQUENCES OF BEING HOMELESS : Navigating the complex interplay of causes and consequences, the article delves into unintended consequences triggered when attempting to alleviate homelessness. Structural causes, such as the lack of affordable housing and social housing shortage, manifest in consequences like social exclusion, hate crimes, aporophobia, and stigma (Gaetz S, 2017).

BEING HOMELESS AND SOCIALLY EXCLUDED: Homelessness results in the loss of access to essential rights and opportunities, challenging human dignity, basic needs, and even threatening life itself. Social exclusion accompanies homelessness, restricting access to opportunities and resources offered to everyone in society. Aporophobia, fear of poverty and poor people, and social stigma compound the challenges faced by homeless individuals (Figure 2).

HOMELESSNESS AS A PROBLEM: The crux of the problem lies in the societal perception that homelessness is not a significant issue. The failure to ensure adequate systems, funding, and support for housing stability contributes to the persistence of homelessness. The goal is to establish housing stability, incorporating affordability, safety, maintenance, accessibility, and suitable size, along with necessary supportive services (Gaetz S, 2013).

Figure 1. Surviving the streets: A chilling night for those facing homelessness.

Figure 2. Innocence Lost: The Heartbreaking Faces of Childhood Homelessness.

PEOPLE AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS: Numerous people face the danger of homelessness because of poverty, personal crises, discrimination, loss of low-cost housing, and insecure tenure. Rising housing costs, stagnant incomes, and personal crises contribute to the precarious situation, with individuals teetering on the brink of homelessness. The fluid nature of homelessness necessitates understanding risk factors for effective prevention.

WHO IS MOST LIKELY TO BE EVICTED: Inadequate income and employment emerge as established risk factors, leading individuals to cycle in and out of homelessness. Supporting those at risk and formerly homeless individuals in earning income and obtaining education is crucial. Educational support, employment training, and income and employment assistance are integral components of a comprehensive strategy (Figure 3).

HOW MANY PEOPLES ARE HOMELESS: Global estimates from the United Nations Habitat Report (2015) suggest nearly 100 million homeless individuals and 1.6 billion lacking adequate housing. The pervasive presence of 'sidewalk dwellers' makes it challenging to quantify homelessness accurately. In India, an estimated 1.8 million individuals, with 52% in urban areas, grapple with homelessness, further highlighting the severity of the issue (Roy A, 2018).

HOMELESSNESS AS PSYCHIC TRAUMA: Drawing from mental health literature, the article examines homelessness as a risk factor for emotional disorders, focusing on psychological trauma, social disaffiliation, and learned helplessness. The loss of home, shelter life conditions, and experiences of abuse contribute to trauma, with a particular emphasis on the vulnerability of homeless youth to Posttraumatic Sress Disorder (PTSD) and associated mental health issues.

PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA AS A CONSEQUENCE OF HOMELESSNESS: Runaway and homeless youth

Figure 3. Faces of Resilience: Capturing the Unseen Struggles of Those Without a Home.

Figure 4. A Mother's Embrace: Amidst the Challenges of Homelessness, Love Provides Shelter for Two Little Hearts.

often face distress from abuse and victimization, leading to additional trauma on the streets. Adverse childhood experiences involving trauma or chronic stress increase the risk of PTSD. Chronic stress in childhood can result in physiological, behavioral, and emotional vulnerabilities, exacerbating mental illnesses among the homeless population.

HOW TRAUMA AND HOMELESSNESS ARE INTERLINKED: The interconnection between trauma and homelessness is multifaceted. Trauma is prevalent in the pathways leading to homelessness, with research indicating that a significant percentage of homeless individuals experienced trauma, particularly in childhood. Trauma can also occur during homelessness, with individuals becoming victims or witnesses of violent events, contributing to re-traumatization. Homelessness itself, involving the loss of home, family connections, and social roles, can be considered a trauma, rendering individuals unable to control their daily lives (Figure 4).

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACE): Complex trauma often results from Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), encompassing maltreatment such as sexual, physical, or emotional abuse or neglect. ACEs can stem from living with an adult with mental illness, substance abuse problems, criminality, or domestic violence. The impact of ACEs is long-lasting, disrupting biological regulatory systems, attachment systems, and impeding healthy social relationships in adulthood.

RECOMMENDATIONS: All communities should develop and implement clear plans to end homelessness, supported by all levels of government.Governments must work collaboratively to increase the supply of affordable housing.Communities and all levels of government should embrace Housing First approaches.Prioritize the elimination of chronic and episodic homelessness.Prioritize finishing Aboriginal homelessness as a distinct class of action and part of the overall method to stop homelessness.Introduce more

comprehensive data collection, performance monitoring, analysis, and research to inform evidence-based strategies (Schwan K, 2018).

CONCLUSION

This serious and scientific exploration highlights the urgency of addressing homelessness among Indian children and adolescents and its profound connection to psychic illnesses. The interplay of causes, consequences, and the intricate relationship with trauma underscores the need for holistic interventions. The recommendations put forth aim to guide policymakers, communities, and stakeholders toward evidence-based strategies for eradicating homelessness and mitigating its enduring impact on mental health. As we strive for a more equitable society, addressing homelessness emerges as a critical imperative, demanding concerted efforts at local, national, and global levels.

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