THE IMPACT OF HOMELESSNESS WORLDWIDE

Being homeless means having no home or permanent place of residence. It is a situation that affects millions of people around the world, and it can be caused by various factors, such as poverty, unemployment, lack of affordable housing, domestic violence, mental illness, substance abuse, or discrimination. Homelessness can also lead to further problems, such as social exclusion, health risks, violence, criminalization, or stigma. Homelessness is a human rights violation that requires urgent and comprehensive action by governments and other actors. The impact of homelessness worldwide is profound and multifaceted. Homelessness affects not only the individuals who experience it, but also the communities and societies where they live. Some of the main impacts of homelessness are:

Poor health

Poor health is one of the most serious impacts of homelessness. Homeless people are more likely to suffer from physical and mental health problems, such as infections, injuries, chronic diseases, substance abuse, depression, and suicide. They also face barriers to accessing health care services, such as lack of insurance, identification, transportation, or trust. These factors can worsen their existing conditions and increase their risk of mortality. Homeless people die on average 12 years sooner than the general U.S. population.

Low education

Low education is another serious impact of homelessness. Homeless children and youth are more likely to miss school, drop out, perform poorly, or repeat grades, due to factors such as instability, trauma, hunger, stigma, or lack of support. This affects their future opportunities and prospects for employment, income, and social mobility. Homeless adults with lower educational attainment

are also at higher risk of unemployment, underemployment, and poverty. Education is an important aspect of preventing and ending homelessness, as it can empower individuals and communities to achieve their goals and aspirations.

Violence

Violence is a serious and widespread impact of homelessness worldwide. Homeless people are more vulnerable to violence, abuse, exploitation, and human rights violations, both on the streets and in shelters. They are also more likely to be involved in criminal activities, either as perpetrators or victims. Violence against homeless people can result in physical and psychological injuries, disabilities, or death. Violence also affects the dignity, self-esteem, and social inclusion of homeless people, as they face discrimination and stigma from society. Violence can also prevent homeless people from accessing essential services, such as health care, education, employment, or housing.

Violence against homeless people is not inevitable. It can be prevented and reduced by providing adequate housing, social protection, legal assistance, and human rights education for homeless people and the general public. The United Nations has adopted the first-ever resolution on homelessness in 2020, calling for urgent measures to prevent and end homelessness, and to protect the rights of homeless people.

Discrimination

Discrimination is the unfair or prejudicial treatment of people or groups based on certain characteristics, such as race, gender, age, disability, religion, or sexual orientation. Discrimination can affect the rights and opportunities of people in various aspects of life, such as education, employment, health, and housing.

Homelessness and discrimination are interrelated and mutually reinforcing phenomena that violate human rights and dignity. Homelessness can expose people to further discrimination, violence, harassment, and criminalization, as well as increased risks of health problems, social isolation, and premature death. Discrimination can prevent people from escaping homelessness, as they may face difficulties in finding or keeping a job, obtaining legal documents, accessing health care, or participating in public life.

The United Nations has adopted several resolutions, guidelines, and reports to address homelessness and discrimination, and to promote the right to adequate housing and social protection for all. The United Nations also calls for the adoption of a clear and universal definition of homelessness, and the establishment of standardized measurements to better understand and monitor the scale and impact of the problem. Furthermore, the United Nations urges the implementation of inclusive, participatory, and human rights-based policies and programs that address the root causes and consequences of homelessness and discrimination, and that ensure the access and empowerment of people in situation of homelessness.

Social exclusion

Social exclusion is the process of being denied or restricted from participating in the economic, social, and political life of a society. Social exclusion can affect people's access to resources, opportunities, rights, and recognition, and can lead to marginalization, isolation, and stigmatization.

- Homelessness is a form of extreme social exclusion, as people who are homeless often face multiple and intersecting barriers and disadvantages that prevent them from enjoying a dignified and fulfilling life. Homelessness can result from, and contribute to, social exclusion in various ways, such as:

- Homelessness can be caused by social factors such as poverty, unemployment, lack of affordable housing, domestic violence, mental illness, substance abuse, or discrimination based on race, gender, age, disability, religion, or sexual orientation.

- Homelessness can expose people to further social exclusion, as they may experience violence, harassment, criminalization, or exploitation by others, as well as increased risks of health problems, social isolation, and premature death[3].

- Homelessness can limit people's access to social protection, such as health care, education, employment, legal aid, or social services, due to lack of documentation, eligibility, affordability, or availability.

- Homelessness can reduce people's participation in public life, such as voting, civic engagement, cultural activities, or social networks, due to lack of information, representation, or empowerment[3].

- Homelessness can undermine people's sense of identity, belonging, and self-worth, as they may face stigma, discrimination, or invisibility by the society.

To address homelessness and social exclusion, the United Nations and other actors have advocated for a human rights-based approach that recognizes the right to adequate housing and social protection for all, and that promotes the inclusion and empowerment of people in situation of homelessness. This approach requires the implementation of inclusive, participatory, and comprehensive policies and programs that address the root causes and consequences of homelessness and social exclusion, and that ensure the access and participation of people in situation of homelessness in the design, delivery, and evaluation of such interventions.