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### Homeless at Mind

When the thought of homelessness enters one's mind, the initial image portrayed in one's mind is "alcoholic men clustered on skid rows" (Breakey, Fischer 1). However, we have been blinded and raised to believe that homelessness is a way of life one has chosen or a punishment for one's wrongful actions. There are numerous reasons to why a person had been lead to the darkness and emptiness of what society has now titled homelessness; however, it is unlikely that one has willingly chosen this ruthless way of life. Homelessness is a result of hardships one was unable to overcome due to the situation and circumstances. Homelessness is never a way of life someone in their right mind would choose for themselves and or family, it is the outcome of various hardships and circumstances that someone in a point of their life was unable to overcome and also could not help themselves out of the darkness of homelessness.

To begin with, homelessness is the product of stressful circumstances brought upon an individual who is incapacitated to manage them. In the novel, *The Tattooed Soldier* by Hector Tobar, the protagonist, Antonio Bernal, a Guatemalan refugee who was once surrounded by intellectual people and financial stability, has fled from his native country that has murder the ones he has loved the most, has now been lead into the emptiness of homelessness. After Antonio's apartment manager, Mr. Hwang, evicts Antonio and his roommate, Jose Juan, Antonio believes, "...he could only blame himself for this fiasco, for having failed at the mathematics of his finances" (Tobar 5). The drastic change from being an educated man to overnight becoming a

simple busboy prevents him to manage his new life and finances. Eviction, the lack of financial funds and having nowhere else to go is a factor that can lead to homelessness and the outcome of this stressful event has pulled Antonio as well as Jose Juan into the emptiness of homelessness. Since Antonio and Jose Juan do not have any friends or relative in Los Angeles, they had no other option but to set camp on the streets of Los Angeles.

As demonstrated in the novel, no one willingly chooses to be homeless; on the contrary, being homeless is unwanted and degrading. After the threat of eviction, Antonio thought to himself, "*Voy a ser uno de los "homeless"* It did not seem right to him that a man who had loved to read, a man with *Crimen y Castigo* and *El Idiota* and the countless other works of real literature scattered on the floor of his apartment, would be called this ugly word" (Tobar 5). With this statement, Antonio makes it clear that he is ashamed to be considered homeless and just the thought and sound of this idea fills his soul with embarrassment and disgust. Antonio's life became difficult after the murder of his family. This event created turning points which eventually lead him into homelessness. He lost his financial stability which resulted in eviction, and with nowhere else to go, homelessness. Antonio provides a demonstration that homelessness is not a way of life one chooses, but rather it is due to circumstances an individual is unable to maneuver themselves out of this situation.

Many people may also see the effect of the almost financial depression our country has been facing, but no one knows exactly the harmful effects it has brought to some. Many people lost their homes due to bank foreclosure as well as their jobs. Many of the people who become laid off are the undocumented immigrants. It is extremely difficult to hold employment without a work permit in the United States. Without finding other employment, an individual or family can only live on their savings for so long. Without a home and employment an individual is most

likely to be guided into homelessness. According to Tracy Peressini's report, *Perceived Reasons for Homelessness in Canada*, there are seven common risk factors that cause or are a roadway to homelessness: "poverty, interpersonal conflict/violence, health (mental & physical), housing loss/affordability, addictions, deinstitutionalization and social safety net failure (lack or public/social support)" (3-4). These factors can vary throughout an individual. These are paths to homelessness because an individual only need one hardship they are unable to overcome to begin a domino effect. One thing lead to another and unfortunately leading many to homelessness they would have never wanted.

Homelessness is not a choice; it is a lifestyle no one in their right mind would prefer over the safety of a warm home. The homeless skid rows could also be called "psychiatric dumping ground" (Breakey, Fischer 1). There have been studies conducted that shows the presence of ADM disorders (Mental health disorders) in homeless populations. Not only this, but there is also an emerging increase of comorbidity (having more than one disorder) within this "skid row" population. Many may argue that many homeless adults are in this position due to their alcohol addiction and are not willing to assume responsibility and take action.

However, according to studies listed in the article, *The Epidemiology of Alcohol, drug, and Mental Disorders among Homeless Persons*, "Recent studies estimate that about one half to three fourths of homeless adults have at least one ADM disorder...5% to 40% are mentally ill without associated alcohol or drug problems" (Breakey and Fischer 1). This shows that even though yes, some homeless adults are alcoholics, this may not be the main cause of their homelessness. This is because there are also homeless adults who do not suffer from this or other addictions, but are mentally ill. This can be the explanation to why the homeless individual is in the streets. If a homeless alcoholic is also suffering from a mental disorder this could prevent the

individual to look for help. A great example is a homeless suffering from Alzheimer's disease because a person is unable to remember many things and is unable to change the side effect of their Alzheimer's. The homeless person may in reality have relatives or somewhere safe to go, however their illness does not allow him to remember where to go. Therefore, the individual is unable to help himself, and takes shelter in the street and remains homeless even though he did not choose to live this way simply that the individual had no other option due to the circumstances.

Many homeless individuals are trapped in the emptiness of homelessness. Many unable to help themselves because they do not know there is something wrong with them. A great way to prevent homelessness is if a person and relatives are aware of any mental illnesses, therefore, providing assistance to the person and avoiding him to be homeless. However, that's usually never the case. It is also extremely difficult to test the homeless and also, "assessment by clinicians is expensive and time consuming" (Fischer 2), because these examinations are costly and require plenty amount of time as well as cooperation these assessments are not usually used. Since there are no results, one is unable to identify if a person is homeless because they are mentally ill. . This can lead to a person remaining homeless because they cannot help themselves. It is also known that many homeless adults suffer from several kinds of illness not only mental but physical as well. However, may not know where to go for assistance and remain homeless. For example, an individual can be extremely injured in his workplace causing him to be permanently unable to work but be denied any help or compensation. Unable to work and without any financial help the person can lose everything and end up homeless.

Domestic violence, abusive parents, and other life wrecking events can lead to life on the streets. Evidence provided by the HCH (Health Care for the Homeless) shows some signs that

alcohol-dependent homeless people “may have had difficulties in childhood and adolescence” (Breakey, Fischer 4). This is an important key to the reasoning behind homelessness. For example if a person had a traumatic early life, those circumstances can lead the individual into alcoholism. When an individual becomes addicted to consuming alcohol he is unable to properly function with the outside world because “homeless alcohol-dependent persons have substantially higher prevalence of other psychiatric disorders and are more impaired in their social and vocational functioning” (Breakey and Fischer, 3). This leads to poor social lives and not being able to keep a job. With the individual unemployed and with no outside support the individual is most likely to find themselves on the streets.

In conclusion, homelessness is not a way of life one willingly chooses. This life is due to the accumulation of stressful events an individual is incapable of overcoming. Even though, some may argue that it is the person's own fault for not looking for assistance, especially when they are suffering from an addiction. However, some may be incapable of reaching out for help because they may suffer from a mental disorder preventing them to help themselves out of the darkness of homelessness. The individual can have also gone through different difficulties in life to end up in the streets. For example, eviction, a mental illness, unemployment or violence could have been the key starter of their path into homelessness without them even expecting it.

“Work Cited”

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