Why does homelessness still occur in the UK today?

Homelessness: a person sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation e.g., living on the streets.

Homelessness can be caused my many issues such as people being unable to afford access to a suitable home. This can range from prejudice (such as letting agents refusing to let people claiming housing benefit) to being unable to afford the costs of renting. Additionally, the unaffordability of private renting is a major cause of homelessness. Over one million people currently claim Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and 35% of those people are in work. (no name, 2021, What causes Homelessness, Shelter). Other factors that cause homelessness are: a child left orphaned and doesn’t have a guardian or right support, someone involved in an abusive relationship (they don’t feel they have a safe place to return to and are forced to leave for safety), financial difficulties maybe because of a drug and alcohol addiction (spending money on alcohol and drugs rather than paying the bills), unemployed meaning you have no source of income, leaving prison with nowhere to return to, house destroyed because of a natural disaster or maybe you are an illegal immigrant coming into the country and have no place to stay. These are some of the many reasons that someone may be classed as homeless.

Following on from the topic of immigrants, there are many arguments you could put forward for advantages and disadvantages of them coming into our country. Some would say that many immigrants start business ventures here which create jobs rather than remove them. However, others have blamed immigrants for taking all our jobs, increasing the problem of homelessness in the UK. Others have blamed immigrants for the rising number of homeless people in the UK since many immigrants have wrongly thought that they were coming to a country where wealth is guaranteed, only to find that opportunities are limited. This misconception can unfortunately lead to them becoming homeless once the reality of our scarce resources becomes apparent.

However, there is still a lot of support that the homeless can fall back onto. This includes having access to Universal Credit (although it will be cancelled if you don’t turn up to the jobcentre when required), housing first- permanent residence given to them by the council so that any other problems can also be tackled (this will make them feel safe in the environment making them more willing to open up however, they might still not be able to pay the bills, even at a lower cost, or might just not be interested in solving their issues so the residence could be more useful to someone else, meaning that they will still end up on the streets), the homeless reduction act- council make a personalised plan to help solve their issues which will make them feel like they are being fully supported. Furthermore, there are hostels and soup kitchens which supply a place to stay at night with beds, showers, laundrettes, water and food (essentials) and hot food throughout the day to try and keep them nourished and healthy.

In addition to this, there are also multi-agency collaborations that are also trying to solve/reduce homelessness. Some examples of agencies are police, NHS, council, hostels, day/night drop-in centres, charities, rehab services and the soup kitchens. This could be very beneficial to the homeless because having multiple agencies working together will make a bigger impact in contrast to one and they all have something different to offer, it makes the homeless people aware at how much support they are being given by how many agencies there are willing to help. On the other hand, there are some negatives to this because by having multiple agencies working together, they might not all agree on something and so they will not come to a sensible conclusion, it could be overwhelming for the homeless to have so much attention on them, and finally, some companies might be in it for the wrong reasons. For example, just trying to publicise their name to increase their economy and make their name more known which does not benefit the homeless as they will not be getting the correct support they need.

Homeless people who have not given up and have found that light at the end of the tunnel have managed to overcome their addictions and hard times and made a better future for themselves. One described it as ‘incredibly lonely and isolating’ as many people instantly think to the stereotypes when they see a homeless person on the street. By thinking they are ‘alcoholics’ and ‘drug addicts’, we are not taking time to tackle these individual issues and instead decide to take the easier route and walk past them. As we are not doing the best we can to help the homeless and take the time to learn about their individual stories and problems, we are only letting this problem increase and making it bigger than it could/should be. Following on from the stereotypes, even if they are ‘alcoholics’ and ‘drug addicts’ this does not make it right to just neglect them and not give them the support they are trying to get. ‘it’s not our place to judge’. However, some homeless people might not be wanting help and do not see the light at the end of the tunnel. This does not give them a sense of hope or courage for a better future but instead leaves them feeling lonely and isolated. As a society we can make each day better for them by doing random acts of kindness. Whether that be buying them food or drink or just having a conversation with them to learn about their hardships, it lets them know that they are not an outcast to society, and we are supporting them in the smallest ways. (no name, 2013, Envision)

Explanations of homelessness in the Global North have traditionally fallen into two categories: ‘individualistic’ explanations, which focus on the personal vulnerabilities and behaviours of homeless people, such as mental health and addictions, and ‘structural’ explanations, which locate the causes of homelessness in broader forces such as housing, market conditions, poverty and unemployment. Most people become homeless because of the structural explanations which they have no control over making them more vulnerable and prone to homelessness. This links back to my point earlier about the housing first intervention as the main reason for homelessness is to do with unemployment and financial issues meaning that they cannot afford accommodation. By the council giving them a permanent residence, it has already helped to solve this issue as it makes them feel more ‘human’ again to have a home/safe environment and this encourages them to get back onto their feet and start earning an income. Although this will not be effective if they cannot keep up with the payments or cannot find a job with a high enough salary.

In all 5.1% of adults living in Scotland over the analytical period said that they had ever been homeless, with more than a third of them saying that this has happened to them in the previous 2 year. The descriptive profile of those affected was touched on in the *Homeless Monitor* series. It indicated that the overall generality of experience of homelessness is almost the same for men and women, and that there is a clear relationship between younger age groups and the likelihood of having recently experienced homelessness, consistent with long-standing evidence from the UK and elsewhere in Europe that homeless people tend to be young. SHS data confirms that well-established vulnerability to homelessness of lone parent households (mainly female) and to a lesser extent single person household (particularly male). Working age adults who are unemployed, sick or disabled were much more likely to report being homeless in the past. This is because they have a lot more financial difficulties and would have found it harder to get help and get through the hard times. (Glen Bramley and Suzanne Fitzpatrick, 2018, Homelessness in the UK: who is most at risk? Tandfonline).

Following on from this, research taken out by housing rights, 2019, demonstrates how homelessness differs by sub-groups (such as young people, LGBT, older people and women) as well as how homelessness differs across geographical areas with different areas having different emphasis on causal factors. In terms of changes over time, it was noted that trends in explaining the causes of homelessness have been subject to the same changes as general trends in ideas over time (moving between structural and individual explanations and how they link). The explanations for homelessness in the 1960s tended to reflect the emphasis on individual pathology which was prevalent at the time e.g., ill-health, substance abuse, addiction). By the 1980s there was a shift to an emphasis on structural factors as a primary driver of homelessness, including the lack of affordable housing for low-income groups. Since the 1980s there has been a change in the explanations, reverting to relying on primarily individual factors in explaining homelessness, until more recently when there has been a recognition of the interaction of these two categories of factors and a recognition of the complexity of those interactions.

Finally, a paper by housing rights,2019, demonstrates that the interaction of structural and personal factors shows that poverty is a powerful predictor of homelessness and it also effects other factors too. For example, poverty has a strong causal effect on mental and physical health outcomes and well-established poverty is also linked to serious forms of drug misuse and chronic offending (someone who consistently breaks the law over a long period of time), all of which increase the risk of homelessness. However, this research has concluded that there is a lack of clarity around the importance of different factors and whilst these are shown to have a big impact, there is not any understanding of what the effects are on different causes of homelessness. (no name, 2019, what causes homelessness and rough sleeping? housingrights.org.uk)

In conclusion, homelessness still occurs in the UK today due to financial issues e.g., with high rent and bills that some people find unaffordable, lack of jobs meaning it is harder for people to find well paid jobs. Furthermore, domestic violence is also a factor because it means that people must move out from an unsafe environment whether they have somewhere to go or not just to be able to escape harm and look for somewhere they can call home. Immigrants also have an impact on homelessness in the UK in both negative and positive ways, however this is up for debate as some people believe it is entirely a negative factor and on the other hand, many other people believe it is entirely a positive factor.