**Why does homelessness still occur in the UK today?**

Firstly, to be able to answer this question we need to understand what the definition of homelessness is. This issue is a lot broader than many people may think. ”Homelessness is not just a matter of lack of shelter or lack of abode” (Somerville 2013). Homelessness is when someone lacks a regular or safe environment even if they may have a roof over their head.

There are many ways in which people have tried to solve this issue. By setting up support systems such as woman’s refuge, hostels, drop in centres, bed and breakfasts,[1] etc. With all of this support, why does homelessness still occur in the UK today? This is because all of these options are temporary for example; drop in centres. Homeless people can go there for one night to avoid having to sleep on the streets but cannot leave their possessions there during the day and they would have to line up again the next. Another example would be woman’s refuge. They can stay here for a while to get away from their abusive household but they may only stay for a certain amount of time meaning they have to return back to a dangerous lifestyle without a safe home. As we can see there are resources to help homeless people but none of them ultimately help people back towards a normal life. The only way you can stop homelessness from occurring is to tackle the issue when it is very minor for an individual such as; not earning enough money, struggling to pay bills, not having access to water or electricity in their home. By helping somebody at this point it may potentially stop this from becoming a major issue leading to homelessness.

People usually try to put homelessness into one of the following categories: bad luck or bad choices? Bad luck meaning that the person who has become homeless through no fault of their own but solely based on peoples actions around them such as abusive family members or bad circumstances have led to this occurrence. The other category bad choices meaning that the reason this individual is homeless is no fault of anyone apart from themselves. For example, if they had a drug or alcohol addiction that has spiralled out of control leaving them on the streets they cannot blame anyone but their own actions for this outcome. Personally I believe that this is a massive issue as to why homelessness still occurs in the UK today because people are categorising a group of thousands of people meaning they cannot get the help they need individually because people are judging them as a whole group. There are also many other reasons why people could be homeless that is not linked to bad luck or bad choices. For example; veterans “Glasgow Homelessness Partnership surveyed the local single homeless population and found 12% reported having previously served in the Armed Forces.”[2] After veterans return from war they may struggle to return back to a normal lifestyle as they are used to living in an environment where their resources are paid for leaving them clueless of how to live in the outside world. E.g. when they return home after service they will need to pay bills or rent to be able to keep living in their home. If this person does not have much support from family and friends or struggles with post traumatic stress disorder this may be something that is difficult for them or they simply don’t know they have to do. Many veterans are also more at risk of substance abuse or poor mental health issues. This is an example of how categorising homelessness can be detrimental to trying to help homeless people as we cannot recognise people who need help and a home to live in that could be provided to them.

There are also many multi agencies such as food banks, soup kitchens, social services, etc. But how do multi agencies help homeless people? “Multi-agency working is about providing a seamless response to individuals with multiple and complex needs.”[3] This shows that multi agencies are trying to give homeless people many options that they can consider to getting back to a normal lifestyle. There are many advantages to this way of trying to tackle homelessness. This can give homeless people more options and deciding what would be the best for them and maybe even multiple options that are best for them. This may also make people feel more cared for as there is normally a stigma around homeless people. “Some scholars have discussed the sociofunctional role of social stigma in classifying certain groups as dangerous”. (Jensen 2017, undignified dignity) many homeless people may also suffer with mental health issues giving them the stereotype of being “dangerous”. If they can choose multiple agencies this can give them a better chance of getting a job and a home. However, there are also some disadvantages to multi-agencies. Working with multi-agencies can sometimes be very competitive as each individual company believes they can help in the best way and cannot all work together. This can sometimes lead to the individual having to walk away as they feel as though they are not truly cared about and will then have to suffer the consequences living on the street again.

The question why does homelessness still occur in the UK today can also bring up many points that may not be linked to helping resolve the issue, but are linked to the homeless lifestyle people have to live and helping these people who have no other option but living on the streets to have a better life. As I have previously mentioned there are many places that homeless people in need of food/water/personal hygiene can go to. However, there is nowhere for these individuals to have entertainment or socialisation. Many people may argue that homeless people are dangerous and should not be given any kind of help as they have put themselves in this position and can only expect very basic care. “The image of the erratic homeless man on the street remains entrenched in the narrative of homelessness in the United States...”(peter Jensen, undignified dignity) However, others would argue that it is a basic human need to have entertainment and have the right to socialise with others and be able to build basic skills. Personally I believe there should be so many resources for homeless people that go way beyond their basic needs but give them more opportunities to live a better life if they cannot see themselves getting off the street in the foreseeable future. I believe this as many homeless people have to sleep on the streets because of horrible situations meaning they have nowhere else to go. For example: ex veterans, domestic violence victims, etc. Them having unlimited resources would mean they can have a better life which is what a lot of these people deserve as they should be treated as a human.

This leads on to ways I think we should try and solve homelessness, which I believe would make homelessness less of a problem for many people. Firstly, I believe that we are only giving short term solutions as I have previously mentioned but how can we fix this? I think that we should offer people that have come to a drop in centre, for example; the opportunity to stay here for as long as they need to depending on their situation, instead of giving just one night. If you look at each individual person and make decisions on how much help and time they need you can give much better advice or support to struggling individuals. I also think that one main issue is there are very limited resources towards helping these people. There are so many people that volunteer to help homeless people and would give them all places to stay with hot water and electricity but there is simply not enough money or equipment to be able to achieve this. There is also not enough housing to provide for people, meaning that people who are trying to help them simply cannot do so without having enough houses for them to stay in. This is one of the biggest reasons that homelessness still exists in the UK today.

In conclusion, I think that homelessness still occurs in the UK today due to inadequate interventions and generalisations of the homeless population and I think this would be solved by having a more open minded approach towards homelessness and to be willing to learn about each individual before judging what help they need. I believe this would give a better understanding of homelessness and decrease the amount of homeless people. If we do proceed with this method I believe it would help a lot of these people. Rough sleepers especially would be able to finally move off the streets or get their life back on track. Another reason homelessness is still such a big concern is because there is simply not enough resources to be able to get every homeless person off the streets or into a safe household.

[1] <https://www.homelesshub.ca/blog/what-are-top-10-health-issues-homeless-people-face>

[2] <https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/docs/default-source/campaigns-policy-and-research/litrev_uk_vets_homelessness.pdf?sfvrsn=110aad9f_2>

[3] <https://www.scie.org.uk/publications/nqswtool/multiagencyworking/>