LORAS COLLEGE

Public Sentiments Regarding Homelessness

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ABSTRACT

The rising trends of homelessness have garnered an increase in discussion and sharing of concern from the public in local and national publications across the country. Analysis of newspaper editorials and articles indicates the sentiments and problems of a community, and aides in distinguishing issues to be addressed. To gather information from a non-metropolitan community, articles and editorials regarding the homeless have been pulled from the *Telegraph Herald*, the primary newspaper for Dubuque, Iowa, for coding and analysis of patterns in language and topic regarding the homeless. This newspaper and community was selected based on population size and ease of accessibility. Information from this study is vital for building a stronger understanding of how homelessness is being treated in a non-metropolitan community, as well as improvements that can be implemented for future research and execution of programs supporting the homeless.

INTRODUCTION

Homelessness in smaller, non-metropolitan communities is a harsh reality that is oftentimes overlooked or misperceived. This issue has been relevant for centuries. Throughout all points of history, there have been clear socioeconomic differences among classes of people. Although the causes of homelessness have changed over time, the discussion on class struggle and opportunities for social mobility has been ongoing. Recently conducted research shows that the main causes of homelessness stems from mental illness, substance abuse, and the effects of economic downfall. The patterns in care for the homeless are often exclusive, leaving groups to fend for themselves. For example, many of the programs currently in place tend to focus on women and children, leaving men to seek out other options.

Oftentimes the efforts in place do not work toward a permanent change in reality. Therefore, there is a need for increased awareness and programs to effectively bring about solutions, rather than just placing a quick-fix over a deep-rooted problem. In order to bring about social change, one must first have a clear understanding of the situation at hand and gauge the sentiments of those in the community. These patterns can result in an outline for driving public opinion, which influences government funding and an overall call for organization to combat the causes and longevity of homelessness. Understanding of the framework that leads to homelessness aims to build a foundation for educating the public on this issue, how it affects their communities, and how they can play a part in altering the future of homelessness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Differentiations in Gender-Specific Programs

Research conducted in the past indicates gaps in availability of proper programming. One element of this includes that there has been little done to specifically focus on the problems facing men. The programs that are currently in place in many communities have some successes, but fail to effectively carry out their purpose due to the high rate of men relapsing back into drugs, alcohol, and violent behavior. Therefore, through conducting this research, it may become clear to people that this issue should be addressed, and that men are significantly less attended to than women. There is also a lack of educational programs that aid men in developing better language and job skills, while also teaching them the essentials to help them out of their unhealthy lifestyle. Society is in need of more than a "Band-Aid" over the issue of homelessness – it is time to focus on ensuring proper programs that have more long-term success, and allow for men to hone a new lifestyle. In relations, resources in a small town are sometimes difficult to work with in considering providing aid; therefore, this is taken into account when interpreting and adapting the information to work for a small community, as there is little research done in the past on these types of communities.

In reviewing past research, many of the studies have shown that that gender has influenced the causes and therapies of homelessness. Through a past study conducted by Rukmana (2010), researchers focused on the difference of residential origins of homeless people living in Florida. From these findings, researchers were able to focus on the primary reasons that so many of these people fell into poverty. Results showed that the issues plaguing women were more divergent and varied in comparison to the conclusions drawn about men. There seemed to be not only gendered differences but also differences pertaining to race/ethnicity. Through

researching the works of others while also conducting individual studies, they were able to determine the various causes of becoming homeless: "history of domestic violence, perceived needs, the occurrence of alcohol, drug and mental health problems, health practices, family and social relationships, abuse and victimization, legal involvement, work history, and responses to homelessness services" (Rukmana 2010:96). This study in comparison to studies done in the past falls on the emphasis of determining the specific origins of homelessness for men and women. The concentration of men and women that cite each of these factors as the main causation of their homeless status essentially brings about a glimpse of what causes homelessness, and what programs would be most effective in reducing these issues. However, they did not speak to how this information can be scaled and generalized to a small town community.

Gender-Specific Causes and Effects of Homelessness

Additionally, past studies have focused on substance abuse and mental health issues in large populations. In a study conducted by Leon (2011), researchers practiced the Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) intervention in order to determine its effectiveness in reducing the number of those suffering from substance and mental issues, while also focusing on how the legal, employment, and housing markets are affected among men. This study also attempted to measure if the intervention was equally effective for a subgroup of minority men (Leon et. al 2011:591). Although race was factored in as an essential variable, gender was ignored. The effectiveness of such a program on women has yet to be seen. In addition to the lacking gender variable, the study negated to consider the generalizability of their results and how they can influence the population of smaller cities throughout the country.

Research that has focused on gender in their variables of study has generally been based around housing stability rates and other available resources within larger metropolitan communities. Many of these studies set out to determine if the role men and women play in their respective communities has an overall effect on living situations. In a study conducted by Rew and fellow colleagues (2008), they set out to answer questions concerning the "effects of duration of homelessness and gender on personal and social resources, cognitive-perceptual factors, and sexual health behaviors among homeless youth" (Rew & Whittaker 2008:109). Similar studies that were more simply focused on rates of incarceration determined that "individuals who have been incarcerated in jails or prisons have higher rates of substance abuse, victimization, mental illness, chronic diseases, tuberculosis, HCV, HIV, and other sexually transmitted diseases when compared with other low income individuals" (Weiser 2009:1459). Yet another study begs to focus on the longitudinal effects of homelessness, and how gender effects the overall duration (Caton et. all 2005). In the end, a majority of the research determines that poverty, among other providing factors, is the primary cause for homelessness (Amato & MacDonald 2011). Although these studies focused on the gender-specific factors and how they relate, they lacked focus on the programs and their effectiveness as many are instituted in areas that result in high rates of homelessness, especially in smaller scale communities with populations less than 100,000.

Much of the further research specifically focused on men and the treatment and effects of drug and alcohol abuse. As stated, "…much of the literature on post-traumatic stress and homelessness focuses on women or families, [while] the majority of homeless people are men" (Kim et all. 2010:39). Kim (2010)'s study also determined "three interrelated pathways to homelessness: social selection, socioeconomic adversity, and traumatic experiences" (Kim et all

2010:40). Also discussed within this framework of the initial causes of homelessness among the male community heavily involves consideration for the mentally ill. Past studies, such as that conducted by Längle (2004), determined the different considerations under mental illness in homeless men. Some of the cited concerns involved psychiatric disorders, anxiety disorders, addiction disorders, and affective disorders (Längle et. all 2004). These results amounted in more generalizable information that can be utilized in small communities, as many of the causes hold similar among cities with both large and small populations.

One of the largest concerns in the next step of analysis toward this situation of homelessness is aimed toward the preventative and other assistance programs, which are usually gender specific, that are in place and their effectiveness. Much of the programs that are currently in place more or less reallocate the issues at hand rather than aiming to offer permanent and reliable solutions. As stated in a study conducted by Cuhlhane and Metraux (2008), "...interventions to reduce homelessness should be redirected from providing shelter alone to assisting households with a range of potential interventions that optimize housing stability and efficiency" (Culhane & Metraux 2008:112). Further explanation of their findings shows that practicing and emphasizing more normal living environments brings about a more likely positive and effective outcome, as it will be easier to duplicate simpler environments after their rehabilitation period. Other research, such as that conducted by Reitzes and colleagues (2001), points out that in the midst of the world of homelessness, these people have created a sense of community in order to deal with the struggles. Sometimes, these relationships can be viewed as part of the healing process, as "support from social service agencies may be perceived as less desirable than support from family or non-kin networks" (Reitzes et al. 2011:276). Therefore, it would appear that a combination of an average, healthy lifestyle implemented with continuing

the bonds of community are some of the pillars of concern when developing an effective

rehabilitation program.

Culture and Public Opinion of Homelessness

To further understand the issue of homelessness in a call for action, one must consider the

culture of the homeless and the sentiments held by those in the respective communities. In a

study completed by Meert and Bourgeois (2005), the researchers took on studying the

relationships of considering both individual and societal dimensions in a community located in

the southern region of Belgium. Their results garnered evidence that those who are "structurally

caught in a closed circuit of deprived neighborhoods and poor housing conditions" are more at

risk of becoming homeless, and oftentimes reside in inadequate dwellings (Meert and Bourgeois

2005: 122). Many individuals migrate between rural and urban establishments, and are subject

to changing social networks in that they recently lost a spouse, they are single parents, etc. The

other pattern within this issue includes the role of the local authorities, which results in

homelessness to appear "quite invisible in many rural areas" (Meert and Bourgeois 2005: 122).

The role of the authorities plays a large part in how the homeless are viewed and regarded in a

community, and how funding for programs is allocated.

In regards to the role of laws and politics related to homelessness, the public has power to

elect and petition their local and federal governments for change. As pointed out in the study

conducted by Anyu Fang, the city government in Atlanta, Georgia, has forbid citizens to feed the

homeless unless signed up to volunteer through eight specific organizations based on health

regulations (Fang 2009:1). Those who distribute food and/or clothing must have a permit

allowing them to do so. Much of the motivation behind such acts follows a desire for a positive

and clean appearance of city streets. As Fang points out, officials have adopted a practice of

"development by displacement – 'urban renewal through a politics of removal...'" (Fang 2009:26), which outlines the agendas of city officials in trying to rid the homeless of the streets in order to find them proper care. The effects of similar actions in cities around the United States are apparent as the number of homeless individuals continues to rise.

While Fang and others offer valuable insights to the modern politics regarding the issues of homelessness, there is a failure to touch on the programs in place to help those kicked off the streets, and what the reactions are from those within the community. Research by Susser further backs up these claims as the discussion over the minimum wage, housing market, and overall culture of the poor has cultivated a pathway for the continuation of homelessness (Susser 1996). The theory of shaping public opinion continues in his analysis of how these relocated populations have shifted identities of the poor and homeless in the global economy, which has played into the vicious circle of this issue. However, both of these reflections continue to focus on communities' at large, sampling from large urban cities skirting the coasts. Susser calls for acts of liberation sociology, in that the public needs to make their voices heard and their personal concerns regarding the issue a concern for their community overall. As he states, those who are concerned do not ask "whether we can describe the lives of the poor but how we can fight against the misery we see created" (Fang 1996:428). Therefore, this continues in support of the theory that the public can play a part in this issue, and ultimately can alter rules and regulations set out by city officials.

Politics becomes a further issue in terms of healthcare related to homelessness. As discussed by Seager and Tamasane (2010), the homeless are at a health risk, yet sometimes lack the appropriate programs and services to aid them in their times of need. In their study focused on communities in Africa, they stated that "homeless people are frequently stigmatized because

people assume they have alcohol or other substance abuse problems, and many are labelled as mentally ill" (Seager and Tamasane 2010:63). Results of the study indicate that a need for better awareness of health needs for the homeless will encourage systematic approaches to fixing the issue. Basic needs for the homeless are in control of the public, who can raise the awareness and become their voices (Seager and Tamasane). The call for public outcry is further emphasized by Alexander Keyssar, who focuses on the history of homelessness and what people can aim to learn from it:

> Yet remarkable as it may seem in an era when the field of social history has flourished and the problem of homelessness has been in the newspapers year in and year out, relatively little has been written about the history of the homeless in the United States or elsewhere. As historians and as citizens, we know far less than we ought to about the evolution of a compelling social problem whose presence appears to be both unacceptable and durable (Keyssar 1991:91).

Without a proper understanding of the theories behind homelessness, including the politics, causes, and stereotypes aforementioned in this literature review, the public cannot make their cry heard in aiding those who have fallen subject to homelessness.

After thorough review of all these discussed aspects, there have been notable gaps in research regarding the call for public action, especially in non-metropolitan communities. Therefore, studies should be based upon a foundation that specifically focuses on garnering the sentiments of those in a smaller community, such as Dubuque, Iowa, whose population hovers around 57,000. My research will include a compilation of public sentiments of citizens in the Dubuque community based on articles and editorials that have been printed in the *Telegraph Herald* between 2011 and 2014. The aforementioned topics on homelessness from past research have been taken into consideration when coding the content. Categories for that will be noted in these publications include religion, gender, general causes, services provided, weather conditions, donations, government, and crime. These elements of discussion among the public

will be used to gauge patterns in how homelessness is handled in the community, where there has been success in aiding this issue, and where improvements can be made for the future. A basic understanding of these aspects from past research will guide the questions and methods for my study, resulting in findings that can be generalized to the Dubuque community and other communities across the United States with similar demographic and information. These findings can then be used as a foundation for future research to combat the issue of poverty and homelessness.

METHOD

In order to effectively gauge public sentiments of the Dubuque, Iowa, community regarding the homeless, it is informative to look to a resource that provides information on how the community is facing this issue. Dubuque is a city of roughly 57,000 citizens, with a population that has maintained a generally homogenous demographic throughout the majority of its history. The homeless within this community in the city is unique in comparison to metropolitan populations in that it is harder to identify and quantify (Hogstrom 2002). Public opinion is crucial in driving funding from the government and an overall call for organization on the issue (Keyssar 1991). In order to gauge public opinion in Dubuque, I selected 30 articles and editorials over the past three years from Dubuque's newspaper, the *Telegraph Herald*, regarding homelessness, to be used for research on how the community views the homeless. After collecting these articles and editorials, I coded each based on the language to be used for observation for patterns of action and opinion.

In this research, I developed three hypotheses to test through the coding and analysis of the selected material. I hypothesized that the articles would provide a focus on religious

providers (H_1), that there would be an increase in published articles regarding the homeless near Thanksgiving and Christmas compared to the rest of the year (H_2), and that the discussed programs focus on aiding women and children more than men (H_3). Since the local newspaper acts as a reflection of the voice of the community, utilizing it as a data source is a useful method in garnering information to test these hypotheses.

Descriptive Data

In analyzing the articles selected, I determined several variables that would be highlighted and coded as a credit toward that variable if the article content met the description. Highlighting the frequency and patterns of conversation among the selected articles guides the focus and direction of the study. A description of the variables used in the study can be found in Table 1, below.

Variable Name	Description
Religion	Religious organization involved/mentioned
Women & Children Homeless	Articles in which women and children are the focus
Men Homeless	Articles in which men are the focus
Risk Factors	Substance abuse and/or mental illness assistance and prevention
Service Provided	Program/activity aiding the homeless
Weather	Action requested based on weather conditions
Donations	Food or monetary donation requested
Government	Law or regulation affecting shelter operation
Crime	Concerns regarding crime related to homelessness

Table 1: Key Qualitative Variables and Descriptions

The variables listed in Table 1 indicate the categorization of the articles and editorials to be used for analysis. These topics cover the major elements of discussion on the homeless, including the religiosity of the programs, the gender of the afflicted, the services offered to improve the lives of the homeless, the change in weather conditions calling for further attention and assistance to the homeless, requests for donations from the general public, and the effects that government have on the care and service to the homeless. Focus on these elements will guide the discussion of patterns and sentiments regarding the homeless in Dubuque, and provide an outline of what is being done and what could be improved upon.

The variable "Religion" relates to religious associations in regards to the specific service offered, or the inspiration for the person leading the movement. Shelters that are founded under churches or religious organizations and bear the name and social teachings of the respective religion are included in this variable. In addition, crediting and referencing God in either article or editorial falls under this topic of categorization.

In categorizing "Women & Children Homeless" and "Men Homeless," the analysis turns to the mentioning of the respective age and gender elements in articles outlining the services and aim of programs for the homeless. Pinpointing the focus of the conversations in regards to age and gender indicates where progress may be made, and where some success may be developing. Mentioned shelters or programs specifically targeting groups based on age and/or gender are included under this variable categorization.

The variable "Risk Factors" focuses on categorizing articles that discuss the possible causes of homelessness, such as mental illness or substance abuse. Sentiments regarding concerned community members, observations, or crime reports indicating homeless individuals under such influences would be categorized under this variable.

The variable "Services Provided" serves as a categorizing element focusing on specific programs and/or activities offered exclusively to aid the homeless. This includes discussion on fundraisers or specific services that are offered by businesses out of kind spirits and good-will of community members. Included services provided are shelters or housing developments and specific programs conducted to aid the homeless.

The variable "Season" is categorized among articles focusing on aiding the homeless due to changes in temperature and upcoming holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas. These

include any mentioning of community involvement that simulates homelessness. Articles posted between November and January will be included in the category as well, as the concern and conversation regarding the homeless tends to increase during months of colder weather.

In categorizing for the variable "Donations," articles offering information for fundraising events, specifically for homeless shelters and services, will be included. Many of the articles will also fall under multiple categories for analysis, as those articles include incentives for donations and a proactive movement.

The variable "Government" reflects the categorization of articles that focus on the changes in policy that affect the funding and regulations of programs and services for the homeless. These changes affect the service provided by shelters, which leads to an impact on the future of the homeless community and future functional efforts.

Finally, the variable "Crime" relates to discussion of some of the additional effects of homelessness that involve resorting to crime. This includes the efforts carried out by the Dubuque Police Department and any citations or disturbances that take place downtown and relate to homeless individuals.

ANALYTIC RESULTS

In selecting, reading, and analyzing articles from the *Telegraph Herald* over the past three years, several patterns emerged in the frequencies of discussed topics relating to the variables. Results are shown in Table 2, below.

Variable Name	Frequency
Religion	10
Women & Children Homeless	5
Men Homeless	10
Causes	2
Service Provided	15
Weather	15
Donations	9
Government	8
Crime	1
Total	75

Table 2: Variable Frequency in Selected Articles
N = 30 articles

The variable "Religion" relates to whether the person leading the programs or services for the homeless are doing so under associated with their religion. For example, in the article "Church's homeless shelter faces 'code,' hard realities" from January 28, 2012, the plan and outline of St. John's Lutheran Guesthouse is discussed with a focus around Rev. Jay Ilten, the founder of the shelter. The tone and purpose of the shelter takes on the religious denomination, signifying the basic motivation behind the service. Another article from May 16, 2012, entitled

"Retired priest blesses shelter home he financed" discusses Rev. Tom Rhomberg's desire to help the poor, which resulted in the funding of a men's home for the Dubuque Rescue Mission. The religiosity is apparent in the steps he takes to bless the home and all its future visitors.

In categorizing "Women & Children Homeless" and "Men Homeless," the analysis turns to the mentioning of the respective age and gender elements in articles outlining the services and aim of programs for the homeless. Pinpointing the focus of the conversations in regards to age and gender indicates where progress may be made, and where some success may be developing. For example, the article entitled "Church plans to shelter families" from May 11, 2013, discusses the gaps in housing offered for families, as there are houses that take in women and children but not men. Men are offered their own facilities, which breaks up families. Articles discussing women, children, and men can be categorized under all three variables, with notes in the consideration toward the recognized gender gaps within the article. Another example rests in an article from July 24, 2012, entitled "Pedaling with a purpose," in which the Maria House and Teresa Shelter aim to raise money to put toward their services, which exclusively aids women and children.

The variable "Causes" focuses on categorizing articles that discuss the possible causes of homelessness, such as mental illness or substance abuse. For example, the editorial "Where is the outrage over lack of services for the mentally ill?" from January 30, 2014, includes frustrations over a previous article outlining the mental instability of a man whose cry for help was unheard. The concerned community member continues with sentiments relating to the homeless, and how the continued lack of service to those who need help prolongs the problem and leads to other issues such as homelessness.

The variable "Services Provided" serves as a categorizing element focusing on specific programs and/or activities offered exclusively to aid the homeless. This includes discussion on fundraisers or specific services that are offered by businesses out of good-will. For example, an article reflecting on U.S. Cellular's attempt in 2002 to offer free long distance calls to the homeless indicates an attempt at aiding the homeless through big business and corporations. Another prime example includes the article "A chance to get creative" from October 23, 2012, which discusses Mary Ellyn Jensen's attempts at allowing the homeless and downtrodden to express their artistic talents through her classes. Oftentimes those on the street are not offered opportunities to hone and express their talents. Other examples include an article from January 7, 2013, regarding classes over budgeting finances and financial literacy for the homeless to be offered at Prescott School through Operation: New View Community Action Agency. Finally, articles outlining awareness and proactive movements are included under this categorization variable. For example, the article "Loras event highlights local homelessness" from November 5, 2013, discusses the "sleep-out" event hosted by the college that invites students to sleep outside in conditions similar to that of the homeless. The effect of the event would hopefully lead to an understanding and drive for action from the students.

The variable "Season" is categorized among articles focusing on aiding the homeless due to changes in temperature and upcoming holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas. For example, the article regarding the Loras students sleeping out in the cold could be categorized in conjunction with the article from February 2, 2013, "2 homeless men take their chances in the bitter cold." The article focuses on the city of Dubuque searching for homeless and counting those in shelters and those they find on the street in order to gauge the size of the homeless population. As a result, they found two men sleeping outside on a particularly freezing night.

Another factor that can be taken into account under this variable includes the timeframe in which the article was written. Articles posted between November and January can be included in the category as well, as the concern and conversation regarding the homeless tends to change with the colder seasons.

In categorizing for the variable "Donations," I scoped for articles that offered a fundraising event specifically for homeless shelters and services. For example, "Sleep Out gathering benefits homeless" from November 9, 2013, discusses the event encouraging community members to sleep under the Central Avenue Parking Ramp to raise awareness and donations for the Hope House. Many of the articles previously discussed include incentives for donations, which results in the articles falling into multiple categories for analysis.

The variable "Government" relates to the categorization of articles that focus on the changes in policy that affect the funding and regulations of programs and services for the homeless. For example, the article "New rules endanger shelters' federal grants" from December 14, 2012, highlights concerns among community members as the federal government changed elements that affect the eligibility of the Teresa House and Maria Shelter in terms of receiving grants. The change in policy affects the service provided by these shelters, which leads to an impact on the future of the homeless community and future functional efforts.

Finally, the variable "Crime" relates to discussion of some of the additional effects of homelessness that involve resorting to crime. For example, the article "Resident: Crime trend does not bother police" from December 1, 2012, mentions how police handle homeless persons that may be part of crimes such as burglary or robbery. The efforts carried out by the police indicate the attention the Dubuque Police Department places on relieving such issues downtown.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Interpretation of these data and results should be considered and used with the consideration of the limitations. Utilizing newspapers for analysis includes comprehending that the publication will only capture the opinions of those who subscribe to the newspaper. Therefore, the results of the data will not be generalizable to the entire Dubuque population, as those who read and write to the newspaper are not wholly representative of the entire community in terms of age, socioeconomic status, and race. Overall, the results of the study are not generalizable in regards to society outside the Dubuque community.

This study can be utilized as a foundation for future studies and as an outline for other communities to conduct similar studies. For future research, analyses should be placed on a greater number of articles. Overall sentiments should also be gauged through mediums other than newspapers to expand on the fact that the study is limited to only gauging public sentiment through newspaper media. Further research should be conducted regarding this topic to validate these findings.

DISCUSSION

Results from the study indicate several trends toward public sentiments regarding the homeless in Dubuque. Firstly, religiously affiliated programs are currently the primary provider of care for the homeless in Dubuque. Much of this is related to their public service and volunteerism incentives encouraged in their practice of faith. These programs are not limited to a single religious denomination; rather, the programs are often interrelated among several religious affiliations.

Secondly, results showed that attention toward the homeless increases around holidays such as Thanksgiving and Christmas, in comparison to the rest of the year. Much of this can be credited to the extremely cold and harsh winter conditions, which brings about concerns for health and well-being for those who are homeless. Many shelters wane their policies on how many people can stay under their roof at night to keep people off the streets in such conditions. The increased number of articles during this time indicates a call for public action and concern during these especially trying months.

Lastly, it can be concluded that Dubuque is taking initiative and striving to provide quality programs that serve homeless men as well as women and children. While programs aiding homeless men have become less recognized and practiced in comparison to those offered for women and children, Dubuque has developed several programs and services specifically geared toward aiding men. Continued discussion regarding the services provided leads to an understanding that the community is apt in promoting and encouraging support among community members. Programs with emphases on men encourage their future and the overall future of the community in battling homelessness. An understanding of the framework that leads to homelessness aims to build a foundation for educating the public on this issue, and how they can play a part in altering the future of homelessness.

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