

# SOCIOLOGY FINAL PROJECT

## HOMELESSNESS THROUGH THE SOCIOLOGICAL

### IMAGINATION

Homelessness stood out to me because of how it connects to the bigger social issues such as poverty, housing costs, and access to jobs. It shows how people's lives can be affected by the things that are outside of their control. Homelessness is an issue that I see within my community as well as how many individuals can create a big impact on personal experiences and the larger scale issues as well.

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# HOW SOCIOLOGY CHANGED MY PERSPECTIVE

Sociology has changed my perspective because it has opened my viewpoint about what is going on around me. Not just the things that you can see from the outside but the concepts as well as the deeper meaning of why things may occur within society. One of the concepts was the idea of socialization and your self-concept. Everyone within society has a different way of how they view themselves and with that how society views you as an individual as well. Society grows up different from one another and can impact how someone may understand something as well as the expectations that go along with it. This can even include the different traditions and beliefs that each family or individual may have. From seeing how the media and society can change the value that you have, to how you as an individual are impacted as well as the path that you decide to make. Many different things within society can impact the lives that surround it. "Values are not static. They change across time and between groups as people evaluate, debate, and change collective social beliefs." (Section 3.2) The things that society does can create an impact whether small or big and can shape the world around us. It can come from many different things, such as behaviors, thoughts, society, culture, norms, media, family, and other institutions as well. Realizing that there are so many different things that happen within, and it can be from an outside perspective or a deeper root perspective of what is going on. There are so many issues that people face and being more aware of the social issues that people face allow for a more informed idea of what is going on. The society that surrounds us is influenced by everyday life and knowing what is going on can help create a better understanding of the society that we live in.

# PERSONAL TROUBLES VS. PUBLIC ISSUES

Using the sociological imagination can help connect what's happening in one person's life to the bigger patterns within society and how personal troubles are linked to public issues. A personal trouble is something that can affect an individual and is usually caused by their own choices or the circumstances they are in. Within homelessness examples of this include losing a job, conflicts with family, and struggling with mental health. With this knowledge society might believe that a person is homeless because of the choices they made but that's only part of the problem. Public issues affect large groups of people and are based on how society is structured. When it is connected to homelessness examples include rising housing costs and lack of affordable housing, low wages that don't match the cost of living, limited access to healthcare and mental health services, and systematic inequalities. From this homelessness isn't just about one person but about how society is organized. To connect these ideas, it is noticed that an individual's failure is influenced by the larger systems within society. An example of this is when a person loses their job, which is a personal trouble, but jobs in those areas pay low wages and rent is extremely high, which is a public issue. Without any sort of savings or support, they become homeless. This matters to homelessness because it reduces the blame on individuals, highlights inequality and the structural problems, and helps society create better solutions. So overall while homelessness may appear to be a result of individual choices, it is often shaped by the larger social structures that can limit opportunities and resources.

# INEQUALITY, CONFORMITY, OR SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

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In Sociology, inequality means that resources, opportunities, and power are unevenly distributed throughout society. Not everyone has the same amount of access to things such as housing, jobs, healthcare, or education. There are many different types of inequality that people in homelessness face. One of the biggest issues that people face is economic inequality. Some people earn high wages and can afford rent, but there is also the side where others work low-wage jobs that don't cover basic needs. When wages don't keep up with the rising housing prices, people are more likely to be behind on rent, get evicted, and eventually could lead to becoming homeless, demonstrating the difference between the rich and the poor. This could be seen through the SPENT simulation. Throughout this you had to make decisions based on what you needed and what was best as an overall. Some of those decisions though were challenging to make as you might have had to give up one thing over another. It created many social expectations about what parents "should" do. This can reflect the sociological idea that individual actions are shaped by social expectations and external pressures. The individual actions are both constrained and enabled by social structure rules and the resources because of the way society shapes the opportunities that people have. Overall inequality contributes to homelessness by creating unequal access to resources like income, housing, and opportunities. People with fewer resources are more likely to experience housing instability, showing that homelessness is not just an individual choice but because of bigger social and economic inequalities.

# GROWTH REFLECTION

In Sociology, there are many things that can create an impact on the society around us. Inequality refers to the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities within society and plays a big role within homelessness. People with lower incomes are more likely to experience homelessness because they may not be able to afford the higher rent/housing prices, healthcare, or other necessities. “The poor often experience inadequate healthcare, limited education, and the accessibility of birth control. But those born into these conditions are incredibly challenged in their efforts to break out since the consequences of poverty are also causes of poverty, perpetuating a cycle of disadvantages.” (Section 10.2) Individual actions are both constrained and enabled by social structure rules and the resources that are available.

After learning about different social movements, different groups of people can create a significant amount of change by working together with a shared goal. They try to show that the issue does exist and does matter. Different social movements can relate to this as many groups of people work together to create change. Things such as protests, marches, and even strikes. They try to show that the issue does matter, and it creates pressure for the people in power and to spread a greater awareness of what is going on. Homelessness is connected to this in how people try to produce solutions and try to show to society that it is an issue and has a deeper issue to what people perceive it to be. Many lives all around the world are affected by the society that surrounds them and leaves a lasting impact on their lives. Conformity and pressure to fit in within a certain standard, the difficult decisions that people make are made based on the opportunities that people have. These things can limit and allow what people are able to do within society as well as how society reacts to these issues especially when it comes to homelessness.

# STATUS

Status is defined as a position that a person occupies within society. When an individual becomes homeless, that status that they carry can shape how others see them. In sociology some statuses can carry a stigma, which means negative labels and even stereotypes. People experiencing homelessness are often unfairly judged, which can affect their opportunities, such as getting a job or housing. Society will commonly judge the homeless without learning the root cause of why someone may be facing homelessness. It also means that homelessness is not just a situation, but a social position that can affect how people are seen, treated, and how they may experience everyday life. Seeing homelessness as a status can help people understand that it's not just about people not having a home but also the identity, social perception, and inequality. Overall, it highlights how society plays a role in both creating and responding to homelessness rather than just how it places it just on the individual.

# ROLE STRAIN, ROLE CONFLICT, AND ROLE PERFORMANCE

Roles are the behaviors, obligations, and privileges attached to status. Role strain happens when someone has one role but struggles to meet all expectations within that role. For someone that is experiencing homelessness, even a singular role, like an employee, can involve strain. That is because they may be expected to show up clean, on time, and even well-rested. But without stable housing, they cannot do that because of the lack of access to a shower, transportation, or even a safe place to sleep. This differs from role conflicts as it occurs when someone has multiple roles that happen at the same time. A person might be a parent and someone trying to secure housing or employment. Shelters may have strict schedules or rules that conflict with work hours and childcare needs, and this is all while someone might be struggling with homelessness. Role performance is how well someone can carry out a role compared to what society expects from it. Due to how homelessness creates barriers, people may be judged as performing poorly even though they are trying their best. Even in busy areas homeless are asking for help, resting, or carrying their belongings. Some may think that they are not being a productive member of society. But that person is trying to manage survival, find social services, and try to maintain relationships or even work. All these concepts from Section 4.3 show how homelessness is not just about lacking housing but affects how people are able to navigate those roles within society. Homelessness highlights just how difficult it can be to try and meet the expectations that society has created. Through role strain, role conflict, and role performance, there is a better understanding of how individuals experiencing homelessness are not failing their rights, but are trying to find their way through a system where expectations of those roles are harder to achieve given the circumstances that they may be in.

# LOOKING-GLASS SELF

Looking-glass self refers to how people form their identity based on how they think others perceive them. They generally imagine how an individual might appear to others, their reactions, and use that to develop their self-concept because of those interpretations. This relates to homelessness because society constantly views homeless individuals negatively and they may even start or may already see themselves as just that. Even stereotypes can be created throughout the public, which can create a further divide between society and the homeless. Overall, it can lower individuals' confidence and can make it harder to improve their situation, showing how powerful society can lead people to think certain things about themselves.

# THE THREE APPROACHES

Approach	What They Do	Main Point	Result
<b>Asheville's Continuum of Care</b>	Provides shelters, job assistance, healthcare, and supports services to people in homelessness	Focuses on helping individuals move through different support systems before permanent housing	Can provide important resources, but the process may create barriers and delay long-term stability
<b>Norway's Housing-First</b>	Gives people stable housing quickly before requiring treatment or unemployment programs	Housing is viewed as a basic human right and stability comes first	Helps individuals focus on employment, mental health, and recovery with fewer barriers
<b>Grants Pass Criminalization</b>	Uses laws and enforcement to regulate homelessness in public areas	Focuses on reducing the visibility of homelessness rather than addressing the root causes	May worsen homelessness by creating criminal records or debt, making employment and stability harder to achieve

From the article there has been a great decline in homelessness. In the U.S. out of homeless per 1000 is 2.3. Whereas in Norway the rate has gone from 1.5 to .62 of homeless people per 1000.

**All of these approaches all recognize homelessness as a social issue which in response requires an organized response. In saying that though, they differ in the way that they treat the homeless.**



# STRUCTURAL CAUSES AND SOLUTIONS

The main causes of homelessness include high housing costs, unemployment, lack of healthcare, as well as weak policies. Out of the different approaches, Norway's Housing-First Model seems to be the most effective. This is because it addresses the root cause of the lack of stable housing within communities.

Without stable housing, it is harder for individuals to maintain employment, health, and stability. Within the Housing-First approach individuals can feel like they have a basic human right such as housing. In the Obvious Answer to Homelessness article, structural forces play a major role when dealing with the issues of homelessness. Norway has a strong welfare system and an emphasis on a collective responsibility. The housing- first model does have its challenges though, as it includes a good amount of government funding, political support, and available housing. But overall, this creates more stability for individuals without having to make certain conditions beforehand. Once people have a place to live, it is easier for them to find jobs and improve their lives.

# LOCAL EVIDENCE

Asheville's Continuum Care is a community-wide system that was designed to help reduce homelessness by working with different organizations. This includes things like shelters, healthcare providers, and government agencies. These groups work together to create more effective responses to homelessness. The main goal is to quickly resolve homelessness and prevent it from happening. With anything though Asheville's Continuum Care has its negatives. Even though this model focuses on helpful services, it also creates barriers. Individuals navigate throughout many systems before receiving any sort of permanent housing. That could overall delay the amount of stability and make the transitions out of homelessness harder for an individual. Besides that, though Asheville's Continuum Care recognizes homelessness as a public issue that is shaped by certain structural factors. By coordinating with many different systems, it helps reduce role strain and role conflict experienced by individuals. The system also helps reduce the amount of stigma that may go along with homelessness. Overall Asheville's Continuum Care addresses both the individual needs and broader systematic inequalities.

<https://www.ashevillenc.gov/projects/asheville-buncombe-continuum-of-care/>

# SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Using sociology, we can better understand homelessness through many different concepts. For example, inequality explains why some people have a greater potential for homelessness. This can include things such as the higher costs for housing, lower wages, and even lack of employment. If you are not employed or get low wages you are at a greater inequality than someone that does. In the case of homelessness people are not given equal opportunities which can lead to other disadvantages when someone is dealing with homelessness and could even make it harder to get out of it. Negative stereotypes can heavily affect individuals and can even relate to the concept of the looking-glass self. Social structure systems show how systems within the economy can affect housing policies and shape the people's lives. Especially when individuals deal with homelessness, those people within lower structures struggle to a greater amount as they must climb their way through many systems to get any sort of help. Together these concepts show that homelessness is not just this random thing that may occur but is influenced by how society works as a whole.

# HOW MY THINKING HAS CHANGED

Over this course, my thinking has changed a lot. It has led me to become more aware of how social systems affect people's lives in many ways. I have also gained a greater understanding for how different individuals experience homelessness. While learning about the different concepts within the textbook, I can now further apply those concepts to the things around me. That doesn't just include homelessness, but within the society that is around me. This allows me to have a greater empathy for different people throughout society and gain a further understanding than what is perceived from the outside. Overall, this has me now thinking of the bigger picture of what is going on within different societies.

# WHY THIS MATTERS

Understanding homelessness sociologically is important because it helps us find the root cause behind the issue of homelessness. While learning about homelessness, the different approaches that are used can create different viewpoints on how society deals with the issue of homelessness. It can change how we think, reduce judgement, and lead to better solutions. This matters beyond this class because homelessness is a real issue that can affect real people within society. If we can see the issues of homelessness, then understanding it is the first step towards creating any sort of change. This not only matters for this class but can create a better understanding and change within our society.