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Проблема бездомности в США

Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются многочисленные аспекты феномена бездомности в Соединенных Штатах, который остается одним из наиболее острых социальных вопросов современности. Она освещает основные причины бездомности, включая экономические трудности, нехватку доступного жилья, проблемы с психическим здоровьем и зависимость от психоактивных веществ. Особое внимание уделяется различиям в распространенности бездомности по регионам и городам страны, где явление особенно заметно в мегаполисах. Статья анализирует существующие программы помощи бездомным, включая предоставление временного жилья, медицинские и социальные услуги, а также инициативы по трудоустройству. Авторы подчеркивают важность комплексного подхода к решению проблемы, включающего как непосредственную помощь людям без определенного места жительства, так и структурные изменения в жилищной политике. В заключении рассматриваются перспективы и возможные пути дальнейшего преодоления бездомности в США, акцентируя внимание на необходимости сотрудничества различных уровней власти и общества в целом для создания устойчивых решений.

Ключевые слова: бездомность, США, социальные проблемы, цены на жилье, программы помощи бездомным, жилищная политика, доступное жилье, социальная поддержка, кризис бездомности.

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The problem of homelessness in the USA

Annotation. The article examines numerous aspects of the phenomenon of homelessness in the United States, which remains one of the most pressing social issues of our time. It highlights the main causes of homelessness, including economic hardship, lack of affordable housing, mental health problems, and substance abuse. Particular attention is paid to differences in the prevalence of homelessness by regions and cities of the country, where the phenomenon is especially noticeable in megacities. The article analyzes existing programs to help the homeless, including temporary housing, medical and social services, and employment initiatives. The authors emphasize the importance of a comprehensive approach to solving the problem, including both direct assistance to people without a fixed abode and structural changes in housing policy. The conclusion examines the prospects and possible ways to further overcome homelessness in the United States, emphasizing the need for cooperation between various levels of government and society as a whole to create sustainable solutions.

Keywords: homelessness, USA, social problems, housing prices, homeless assistance programs, housing policy, affordable housing, social support, homelessness crisis.

Introduction

Homelessness in the United States has become not only a social crisis, but also a humanitarian one that requires immediate attention and a comprehensive approach. Over the past several decades, there has been a steady increase in homelessness, affecting millions of people who find themselves in difficult situations. This problem affects not only individuals, but also entire communities and cities, damaging social stability and economic development.

The causes of homelessness are multifaceted and multi-layered, including economic and social factors such as skyrocketing housing costs, lack of affordable health care, mental health, and substance abuse. However, despite government and non-profit efforts to combat the problem, results often remain insufficient, and homelessness continues to increase.

The purpose of the study is to identify the main reasons for the growth of homelessness in the United States, analyze existing assistance programs and evaluate their effectiveness, and identify possible solutions to this complex problem. An in-depth analysis of the situation helps not only to better understand the scale of homelessness, but also to develop strategies aimed at reducing it, contributing to the improvement of the quality of life of people in distress.

Research results

Since the federal government began tracking homelessness nearly 20 years ago, the number of homeless people in the United States has risen to an all-time high. In January 2024, 772,000 people were homeless on a single night in the country, an 18% increase year-over-year [2]. By comparison, in January 2023, the number of people in the United States without housing and forced to live on the street, in shelters, emergency shelters, or in a car exceeded 650,000, an increase of 12% year-over-year. In 2024, the number of homeless people in families with children increased sharply, by 39% [6]. Homelessness is widespread throughout the country, but it is particularly visible and widespread in some cities, such as Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco, due to high real estate prices and a shortage of affordable housing.

The Wall Street Journal reported a sharp increase in the number of homeless people in the United States in 2024, citing data from more than 250 organizations that provide assistance to such people, which reported an increase in the number of homeless people by almost 10% compared to 2023 [4]. The estimates of the number of homeless people presented by the American administration may be underestimated, since the final figure does not include certain categories of citizens and those who live with friends or relatives because they do not have their own housing. These figures may vary depending on the season and sources, but, as a rule, represent the general picture.

The rate of homelessness in the United States has risen sharply in the past decade as a result of rapidly rising housing costs. For example, rents have grown 1.5 times faster than wages in the past four years alone. At the same time, housing costs have outpaced wage growth in 44 of the 50 largest metropolitan areas in the United States [7]. Even the fact that apartment construction has reached its highest level in decades has not reversed the trend. The increase in the number of homeless people has been affected by natural disasters, in particular the wildfires that occurred in Hawaii in 2023 [10]. The increase in homelessness is also due to the influx of migrants seeking asylum at the US-Mexico border.

In the United States, homelessness is a complex issue that involves many different groups of people, each facing unique circumstances and challenges. Here are the main types of homeless people:

– temporarily homeless, who find themselves without housing for a short period of time. They may be in the process of finding new housing, often facing difficulties such as job loss or relationship breakdown. This group may seek help from crisis services and temporary shelters;

– permanently homeless, living on the street or in shelters for a long time, possibly suffering from chronic illnesses, mental disorders or addictions, which makes it more difficult for them to adapt to life in society and find permanent housing;

– parents with minor children who are forced to live in shelters or temporary housing, often facing additional difficulties in accessing educational and medical services;

– young people and adolescents who have left their homes due to family conflicts, abuse or neglect, and who, without adult support, face various risks, including exploitation and addiction;

– people with disabilities, physical or mental health problems, who lack access to housing and health care. They often have more difficulty finding work and housing, which exacerbates their homelessness;

– returning military veterans facing homelessness due to issues with readjustment to civilian life and health issues, including trauma and psychological disorders such as PTSD;

– older people, often with limited financial resources, who also become homeless if they cannot afford housing or have insufficient support from family or government agencies;

– homeless people suffering from substance abuse, which makes it difficult for them to integrate into society and receive help. This group often faces discrimination and criticism;

– people leaving correctional institutions who face difficulties in finding housing after release, which leads to repeated homelessness [6].

The causes of homelessness in the United States can be divided into several key categories. Economic factors that contribute to homelessness include unemployment, low income, and housing affordability [1]. Many people lose their sources of income or work in low-wage jobs that prevent them from affording adequate housing. Minimum wage jobs also often do not cover living expenses. Rising housing and rent prices, especially in large cities, make housing unaffordable for many people. The combination of low wages and high housing costs creates serious financial hardship.

Social factors that contribute to homelessness include family problems, inequality, and discrimination. For example, family conflicts, divorce, violence, or loss of custody of children can lead to people ending up on the streets. Racial and economic discrimination, as well as prejudice against certain groups, also make it difficult to access housing.

Another cause of homelessness is mental disorders and addictions [8]. People with undiagnosed or undertreated mental illnesses are more likely to become homeless. Without adequate medical care and social support, many of them cannot lead a normal life. Alcoholism, drug addiction and other forms of addiction can lead to financial difficulties, homelessness and social isolation.

Of particular note is the impact of systemic causes on homelessness, such as the lack of affordable housing, inadequate social services, etc. This includes the need to increase the supply of affordable housing for people with low incomes, as well as the lack of public and private support for the construction of new housing. This also includes limited resources for support programs, addiction treatment, and mental health.

Crises such as job loss, sudden illness, injury, or death of a loved one can dramatically change life circumstances and lead to homelessness. People leaving institutions such as prisons or mental health facilities also often lack the support or resources to reintegrate back into society [5]. Hurricanes, floods, and other natural disasters can leave people homeless. These factors often interact to complicate homelessness, and all of these factors must be considered together to effectively combat homelessness.

There are many programs and initiatives in the United States that help homeless people, varying in their scope, goals, and methods of implementation, but all of them aim to solve the problem of homelessness and help people find stable housing and support again. Let's list the main types of programs to help the homeless.

1. Numerous shelters and transitional housing provide temporary housing, food, and necessary support. They can be specialized (for example, for women, children, or veterans) or universal. Some organizations offer temporary housing for several months. Housing is often combined with additional services, such as psychological support, skills training, and vocational training.

2. The Rapid Re-Housing program aims to quickly provide housing to people experiencing homelessness, including assistance in finding housing, financial assistance to cover initial costs, and support in adapting to independent living. The Supportive Housing program offers housing

with additional support in the form of mental health services, addiction treatment, and social integration, which is especially important for people with high needs and chronic problems.

3. A large number of organizations offer people with addictions various rehabilitation programs that combine treatment with housing and support. Programs that offer psychological support and therapy to people with mental disorders help people to better adapt to life and maintain housing.

4. Initiatives like the Housing Choice Voucher Program offer financial assistance to cover rent, which helps provide access to housing for low-income families. Some organizations also offer emergency grants or loans to cover housing costs, which can help prevent eviction.

5. Vocational training programs that help homeless people gain new skills and find jobs, some of which are designed to partner with businesses to provide internships and jobs for homeless people.

6. A large number of NGOs and volunteer groups work to raise awareness of homelessness, raise funds, and organize events to support homeless people. In addition, local, state, and federal governments offer various programs and funding to combat homelessness and support vulnerable groups. The Biden administration has also taken steps to reduce homelessness. In particular, in 2023, the ALL INside program was launched to find places to house homeless people in several states. With its help, their number was planned to be reduced by 25% by 2025.

The implementation of homeless assistance programs in the United States has led to significant results, which vary depending on their type, region, and available resources. Rapid housing models have demonstrated consistently good results, and studies show that 70-90% of Rapid Re-Housing participants maintain their housing 6-12 months after receiving assistance [11]. Housing models without prior commitment to rehabilitation or treatment have demonstrated a significant reduction in homelessness among veterans and people with mental illness, and some cities that have implemented the Housing First model have seen homelessness rates decrease by 30-50% [12].

Some programs integrate social and health services with housing. Participants in such programs show improvements in mental health and a reduction in drug and alcohol abuse by 30-40% [9]. Training and employment initiatives increase the chances of finding permanent employment [3]. Up to 60% of their participants find work within a year.

Large cities like Los Angeles and New York often face funding issues and a lack of affordable housing, resulting in higher rates of homelessness than smaller cities where programs have been more successful. But despite their impressive results, many programs face a number of common challenges, such as a lack of funding and resources, a shortage of social housing and high rents, and a need for a customized approach.

Let us list some key areas that can speed up the process of solving the problem of homelessness.

1. Expanding Housing First models by increasing funding (more public and private money to create and maintain affordable housing) and integrating social services (adding access to health and mental health services).

2. Taking preventive measures, such as supporting families on the verge of eviction (financial assistance, legal support), skill development programs for people in vulnerable situations, etc.

3. Improving the availability of services (creating a unified system for finding necessary resources, such as housing, medical care and psychosocial support, developing mobile applications and online platforms for contacting social services and obtaining information).

4. Interaction with the private sector (partnerships with developers, investments in social enterprises that create jobs).

5. Social inclusion and community initiatives (organization of volunteer movements and local initiatives aimed at helping the homeless, educational campaigns to increase public awareness of the causes of homelessness and create a more favorable atmosphere around people in difficult life situations).

6. Targeted policy measures to combat homelessness (development of a unified strategy at the federal government level, development of bills protecting the rights of homeless people and simplifying access to housing).

7. Research and data analysis, including collaboration with universities and NGOs to explore new approaches and share experiences.

Overall, addressing homelessness in the United States requires a comprehensive approach and the participation of the entire society. A combination of political, social, and economic initiatives can lead to significant improvements and, ultimately, a reduction in the number of people experiencing homelessness.

Conclusion

The problem of homelessness in the United States is a complex and multifaceted challenge that affects millions of people, has profound social and economic consequences, and requires radical solutions. The analysis found that homelessness is not a phenomenon that can be ignored or considered isolated; it is rooted in many systemic problems, such as a lack of affordable housing, rising rents, inadequate health and social services, and stigmatization of certain groups.

Existing homelessness programs, while making significant strides toward improving the situation, are often ineffective due to insufficient financial support, lack of resources, and poor coordination between various public and private agencies. A comprehensive approach is needed that includes not only temporary housing but also long-term solutions such as mental health support, training and employment programs, and more accessible health services.

To create a more just society, all stakeholders need to come together: government, non-profits, local communities, and civil society. A sustainable approach to addressing homelessness requires not only the allocation of resources, but also a change in public perception of homelessness that can help overcome bias and stereotypes.

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