Revealing The Issue Of Young Homeless

Sources of stress among an individual's life span are evident as people face numerous developmental tasks throughout the course of a lifetime. These stages from the family life cycle vary from childhood to old age. It is common knowledge that stress is prominent throughout a person's entire life, however young adults are faced with the task of selecting a course for their lives that may include a career, marriage, children, and social activities. It is an exciting stage of life as well as full of challenges. High school and college-age students are particularly prone to mood swings, anxiety, and depression. This makes the young adults more prone to means of self destruction as a way out. Common stressful situations that young adults face are gaining independence, concerns about the future, sexual relationships, friendship/peer relationships, pressure from too much work, and vocational decisions.

1. Overview of Stressors Faced by Subpopulation

In addition to these stressors/developmental tasks that young adults face during their stage of life, the subpopulation of young adults who are homeless face another wave of stressors. Major stressors that the subpopulation of young homeless adults face would include food and housing insecurity, mental illness, limited employment skills, peer substance abuse, addiction, and fear of being arrested. The Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) is a HUD report to the U.S. Congress that provides nationwide estimates of homelessness, and they stated, "On a single night in 2019, 35,038 unaccompanied youth were counted as homeless. Of those, 89 percent were between the ages of 18 to 24. The remaining 11 percent (or 3,976 unaccompanied children) were under the age of 18." This highlights the urgency for attention for not only the entire population of the homeless community, but those who fall under the category of young homeless adults. Stress management is an urgent priority for this particular subpopulation as it combines the stressors associated with the transition to adulthood while being a vagrant "Self injurious behavior among homeless young adults: A social stress analysis" by Kimberly Tyler discusses a study conducted to measure the effects of stressors that young transients in 3 Midwestern US cities face in a social context. The study concluded that "stressors tend to vary according to one's social location and their impact on mental health outcomes is likely to differ across groups or social conditions, we examine gender and sexual orientation, which are status strains that are important for understanding self injury." As people who are homeless are stigmatized, it only heightens their vulnerability to mental health issues, and self destructing behavior such as substance abuse to cope because of the lack of resources and support system.

2. Coping Strategies and Stress Burden

In relation to stressors and social context, the subpopulation of young transients tend to act and make decisions that may temporarily reduce symptoms of stress, but carries negative long-term consequences. This can be defined as maladaptive behavior as a means to deal with stress burden. Kristin M. Ferguson led a research study, "Gender, coping strategies, homelessness stressors, and income generation among homeless young adults in three cities," that compares in detail the cause and effect of different coping strategies, mental illness, and addiction to source/ amount of income young vagrants attain. Without the proper resources and family

support to cope with vagrancy at such a young age a large portion of these individuals are faced with dealing with their depressive disorders alone, whether they are biologically based or not. Mental health issues, maladaptive behavior more often then not lead to substance abuse. In a vicious cycle seen more often than not, this then leads to these individuals incapable of sustaining a legal job. Ferguson makes this evident as the study's results states, "Homeless young adults who relied on fewer avoidant coping strategies reported earning more diverse legal sources of income than their peers who relied on greater avoidant coping strategies." The defense mechanisms of denial and repression bury issues and tend to look past anything that proves there is a problem. So, it only makes sense that those who follow avoidant coping strategies in this population succumb to illegal activity to provide income to feed their addiction or to cope with their mental illness. Contrastingly, the study Ferguson affirms, "Although only marginally significant, those using more problem-focused coping strategies reported earning income from a greater variety of legal sources than those who relied on fewer problem-focused coping strategies." As problem-focused coping strategies involve adaptive behavior, it makes sense that that individuals who take part in adjusting their behavior and thinking towards the stressors they are faced with exert more control over certain aspects of their lives. However, young vagrants with depressive disorders such as bipolar disorder and major depression reported to attain income through illegal sources. With the lack of resources and family support, it follows the pattern of attaining money illegally and coping with stress through illegal drugs.

3. Stress Management and Prevention

Prevention of young adults becoming homeless isn't a one way street. These individuals are faced with a lack family ties, housing stability, job security, and resources to combat their mental health issues. However, it is true that the first step in advancing forward under these circumstances is to sustain an internal locus of control and avoid withholding the personality of learned helplessness. This includes reaching out to family and renegotiating past conflict or breaking the tension. Taking these steps have proven to be a preventative measure of young adults being kicked out or running away from home. Due to their low amount of resources, "Homeless individuals not only have to agonize over daily survival but are also shunned within society because they do not live up to cultural norms and expectations."(Paula Mayock).The key to preventing and exiting young adults from a life of being homeless is strengthening family ties but also more integrative social work intervention. A more immediate approach to the issue would be increasing supports to youth and families in crisis by implementing community programs. Many people believe that this subpopulation chooses to be on the streets when the reality is that housing is not affordable for most. According to the Homeless Census in Santa Clara County, 93% of homeless respondents want affordable housing. Further research and aid is needed to fully address the stressors, maladaptive behaviors, and prevention necessary to decrease the subpopulation of young adults who are homeless and their families in crisis.