

Issues and Principles associated with

Homelessness in Australia

HOMING IN on the *real* issues of homelessness



Aug 6-12

An exploration of a contemporary social issue to highlight the importance of education as the critical interpretation and evaluation of culture.

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How does homelessness affect Australians?

- Each night 105,000 Australians are homeless.
- 43% of these are under the age of 25.
- 25% are under 18.
- 56% are male.
- 10% are indigenous Australians.
- 12,000 are under the age of 12.
- 50% of people who request immediate accommodation each night are turned away, as are 66% of children and 80% of families.



www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au

[Click here for Phil Collins' 'Another Day in Paradise' song and lyrics.](#)

How is 'homelessness' defined?

Mackenzie and Chamberlain's definition:

- ***Primary Homelessness:*** Experienced by people without conventional accommodation (sleeping in parks, streets etc).
- ***Secondary Homelessness:*** Experienced by people who frequently move from shelter to shelter (emergency accommodation).
- ***Tertiary Homelessness:*** Experienced by people staying in accommodation that falls below minimum community standards (caravan parks, boarding houses).

There are many complex causes of homelessness in Australia:

1. Domestic Violence and separation:

- Domestic violence includes: physical, sexual, emotional, economic or spiritual abuse.
- In most cases, the perpetrators are men.
- Almost half the women staying in homeless institutions are escaping domestic violence.





2. Illness, mental illness and addictions:

- Rates of mental illness are believed to be significantly higher amongst people experiencing homelessness, than those stably housed.
- Often dependency on alcohol gambling or illicit drug use follow life events and often follow histories of trauma.
- This series of trauma can often lead to homelessness.

3. Poverty and debt:

- Poverty and inability to afford adequate housing are central to the of homelessness.
- These circumstances may result from long/short term unemployment, financial pressures, housing market pressures and lack of public housing.





4. Unemployment:

- Being out of work or under-employed leads to financial stress and is a leading cause of homelessness.
- The 'Newstart Allowance' for unemployed people equates to just \$35 per day.
- Young homeless people are often disengaged with school and are therefore less likely to be employable in the longer term. *Watch 'the Oasis' film about youth.*

5. Disability:

- people with disabilities are at increased risk of becoming homeless.
- disabilities may often be wrongly classified as challenging behaviours leading to people becoming barred from services and not receiving correct support.



6. Refugees and displaced persons:

- Humanitarian entrants face a number of significant barriers to accessing services and sustaining stable housing, including: lack of literacy, poor knowledge of available services, aversion to seeking help and past experiences of discrimination, governmental neglect and violence.
- Being 'kicked out of home' is a major cause of young people becoming homeless, usually as the result of family conflict or the addition of a step-parent.
- Some older Australians are also ejected from their homes by their own children, grandchildren or carers.
- Being 'kicked out of home' compounds the homelessness with feelings of rejection and the sudden breakdown of the family unit. Click here for [*the Children's Perspectives.*](#)

7. Unaffordable housing:

- More than 350,000 Australians are in housing crisis, allocating more than 50% of their income to service the cost of housing. These people are at high risk of becoming homeless.
- There are just over 250,000 Australians on public housing waiting lists across Australia, many of whom have been waiting much longer than 5 years for a property.
- 85,000 dwellings are needed, now, just to provide homes for people currently experiencing homelessness.
- There is a shortage of affordable housing available to the lowest earning 40% of Australians.

Read 'The Australian dream is growing hazier' from The Age, 2011.

Effects of homelessness on individuals:

1. *Youth*

- Children's health and education are affected by homelessness.
- May inhibit physical, emotional, cognitive, social and behavioural development.
- Repeated periods of homelessness lead to developmental delays and emotional difficulties.
- Homeless youths are more likely to have been victims of crime and/or involved in criminal activities.



2. Adults

- People who are homeless for extended periods of time often suffer from premature aging.
- Homelessness leads to detrimental physical and psychological health.
- Long periods of sleeping rough may result in premature death, often due to chronic illness.



Effects of homelessness on Australian society:

- homelessness increases the likelihood of crime, further abuse of alcohol and substances
- it can lead to long term unemployment, lower incomes and lower productive economic output
- homelessness leads to a cycle of further unemployment and homelessness
- it can lead to a breakdown of social and family cohesion
- it can lead to an increased demand for service providers and govt. services causing increase in costs through taxes etc. Cost savings in support services alone will outweigh the costs of providing stable housing for homeless people.
- homelessness is a human rights issue which affects future well-being
- there is a necessity for further research and policy discussion

Watch the ABC Q&A program 'Is Homelessness a Choice?'

Positive responses to homelessness in Australia.

Organisations providing support services:

[Read here about one independent inquiry into homelessness.](#)

1. St Vincent de Paul Society:

The St Vincent de Paul society was founded over 150 years ago and provides assistance to those through its network of members and volunteers. It aspires to be recognised as a caring Catholic charity offering help to people in need.

2. Homelessness Australia .org

Homelessness Australia was formed in late 1998 as the Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations. It is a national peak body advocating for people experiencing homelessness in Australia and those who provide services for them.

3. Mission Australia



Mission Australia is a community service organisation that has assisted Australians in need for more than 150 years. They provide over 550 community and employment services that help over 300,000 Australians each year.

4. The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army has provided accommodation and care for older Australians for more than 90 years. The Salvation Army's aged care work began with a commitment to the homeless and destitute. This was later extended to include others in need of residential care.

5. Youth off the Streets

Youth Off The Streets has been providing services to assist homeless and disadvantaged youth since 1991. YOTS believe that in order to break the cycle of disadvantage, abuse and neglect, all young people need to be provided with the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

[Click here to view Father Chris Riley's TV Commercial for YOTS.](#)

6. Anglicare

Anglicare offers a range of family support and emergency care services including a 'Street Outreach' program contacting and supporting homeless youth.



References:

www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au

www.aifs.gov.au (Australian Institute of Family Studies)

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<http://aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=10737422221>

<http://au.reachout.com/find/articles/homelessness>

http://www.hreoc.gov.au/human_rights/housing/homelessness_2008.html

Further issues for investigation by Stage 6 students in *Studies of Religion*:

While this presentation has concentrated on the causes and impacts of homelessness as well as some institutions' responses, here are several other issues for students to investigate:

1. Homelessness and youth
2. Homelessness and the indigenous
3. Whole family homelessness
4. The impact of Government policy and funding
5. The impact of welfare payments
6. Work of support agencies
7. Generational cycles of homelessness
8. Community perceptions of homelessness
9. Homelessness and women
10. The importance of education/formal schooling
11. Role of Police in response to homelessness
12. The impact of house affordability
13. Effect of economic and workforce changes eg. casual labour, the GFC
14. Catholic Church responses to homelessness
15. Scriptural references to poverty and homelessness.