

# Introduction

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There is nothing new about homelessness. There have been homeless people for some 10,000 years—from the time when humans built their first permanent homes in the first towns of the Fertile Crescent. The historical record, novels and poems, and sacred texts tell us the stories of beggars, wandering ascetics, penniless friars, displaced peasants, lost soldiers, street youths, vagrants, new arrivals in the city, and displaced workers.

Homelessness has changed over the years. In the United States, during the late nineteenth century, it was hoboes and tramps who drew the attention of the public, the police, and then the social reformers of the Progressive Era. From the 1920s through the Great Depression, attention shifted to the skid rows, home to transient workers and retired single men. The decline of skid rows in the 1970s was followed by a new era of homelessness with many formerly institutionalized people—who had untreated or poorly treated emotional disorders—winding up on the streets of America. In the 1980s, the nature of homelessness changed again. Growing economic inequality, racism, a permanent decrease in the number of well-paid unskilled jobs, and a lack of affordable housing combined to make several million people—many of them African-American women and their children—homeless on America's streets, in shelters, in motels, and in substandard and temporary apartments. This pattern continues in 2004.

Homelessness is not just a U.S. problem, although when viewed cross-culturally, it becomes a more complex issue. In many developed nations, homeless families, many of them immigrants, are the major issue. In the developing nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the homeless are often women and their chil-

dren, youths, and migrants from rural areas who have come to cities looking for work and opportunity. The emergence of many cities in developing nations as major regional or global commercial centers has made the problem even worse, by increasing the appeal of cities as employment centers to the rural poor while at the same time providing less and less affordable housing and support services for immigrants.

The goal of the *Encyclopedia of Homelessness* is to summarize our knowledge of homelessness. This includes describing the patterns of homelessness in the past, focusing on the recent and current situation in the United States, and sampling homelessness around the world. Entries cover causes; history; legal issues, advocacy, and policy; legislation and programs; lifestyle and health problems; organizations; research; services and service settings; size and perceptions; subpopulations and lifestyles; and world issues and perspectives. Descriptive articles cover homelessness today in eight major American cities and more than thirty cities and nations around the world. These entries allow for quick and easy comparisons.

Homelessness is one of the least understood social issues. The public image of homelessness and public perceptions of the nature and causes of homelessness have little relation to the reality of the situation. Most Americans have little or no contact with homeless people. Encounters on the street are quick and awkward and immediately pushed out of one's consciousness. I vividly remember that when I was doing anthropological research posing as a panhandler near the Bowery in the early 1970s, passersby simply did not seem to know that I existed. In that guise, I had no place and

therefore no existence in their social and physical world. This avoidance of the homeless has made it easy for misconceptions to develop and persist—misconceptions that are routinely reinforced by the depictions of the homeless by the news media, on television, and in film.

Homelessness in the United States has changed dramatically since my research in 1971 on the transition of skid rows like the Bowery. This was a time when skid row was just about gone, and a few years before the homeless population went from being single, old men to younger men, the deinstitutionalized mentally ill, and the working poor who could not find affordable housing. Still, there are commonalities from the past to the present, including health problems, violence, inadequate housing, lack of jobs, difficulties with law enforcement, and a continuing avoidance of homeless people by most of American society. At the same time, as this encyclopedia shows, there are solutions and potential solutions at hand, and our understanding of homelessness in its various forms is more complete and more policy-directed than in the past.

Despite the changing nature of homelessness, when I tell people about this encyclopedia, they are usually surprised to hear that it is not mainly about drunken old men on the Bowery. They are even more surprised to hear that it contains much about families and children, African-American women in the United States and other Western nations, street children, and immigrant families in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. And, they think the homeless is an issue only in poor neighborhoods in large cities. Sure, they know about Construct, Inc., in our small town of Great Barrington, Massachusetts, and its annual Walk for the Homeless, but they never realized that their donations actually help provide food and shelter for homeless people in our affluent community. They are also unaware that the rapidly rising housing prices in response to the housing boom created by well-off second-home owners and retirees has produced an affordable housing crisis and more homelessness in the rural Berkshires of western Massachusetts.

A major purpose of this encyclopedia is to correct these false images and misconceptions and beliefs from the past by providing readers with a comprehen-

sive, accurate, and up-to-date description of homelessness in the twenty-first century.

## AUDIENCE

As a topic of considerable current urgency, with a rich history and drawing the attention of experts from different disciplines and perspectives, the *Encyclopedia of Homelessness* meets the needs of a broad audience. This includes sociologists, anthropologists, economists, historians, and other social scientists; social policy analysts and planners who develop control and prevention programs; program administrators; physicians, social workers and lawyers who provide advocacy and services; journalists; and students in high school through graduate school in history, social studies, and the social sciences.

## SCOPE AND BREADTH

Homelessness is a complex topic, and experts have yet to agree on a single definition or criterion to measure homelessness (see entry on Homelessness, Definitions and Estimates of). To some extent, this is because the nature and severity of homelessness as a social issue has changed over time, has varied over place, and has been studied or dealt with by different groups of experts. Homelessness has been a topic of interest for religious organizations, journalists, social reformers, public policy analysts, filmmakers, photographers, poets, novelists, songwriters, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, historians, geographers, physicians, government officials, law enforcements agents, attorneys, and social workers.

The contributors to this work come from many of these disciplines and several others, and they bring different perspectives to homelessness. These varying perspectives are apparent in many of the more focused entries, while a broader, interdisciplinary perspective defines the more general overview entries on topics such as prevention, health, and services.

The issue of homelessness cannot be addressed apart from the related issue of housing. This is true everywhere today, but especially so outside the United States where homelessness is often defined as a lack of housing or suitable housing. In the Western world, it is clear that

a lack of affordable housing is one the leading contributing causes to homelessness today, and solving homeless will require providing affordable housing for all.

Global coverage is a hallmark of Berkshire Publishing encyclopedias, and this one is no different. Two general overviews—Homelessness, International Perspectives on, and Housing and Homelessness in Developing Nations—address the major patterns and issues of homelessness. These are supplemented by several dozen focused entries on international organizations and homelessness in a sample of nations and cities. In addition, information on homelessness beyond the United States is provided in each of the five appendixes.

The entries cover the following eleven general topics.

#### *Homelessness in the United States*

These entries examine the nature of homelessness in the United States in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Covered are the number of homeless, characteristics of homeless populations, subgroups, lifestyles and lifestyle issues, and perceptions of the homeless.

#### *Homelessness in U.S. History*

These entries cover homelessness in the past including hobo, tramp, and skid row culture, with an emphasis on social history and within the context of key events and processes in American history.

#### *Research on Homelessness*

Studying homelessness is not easy, and multi-method approaches often produce more trustworthy and richer conclusions than do single-method approaches such as a questionnaire. These entries cover research strategies and methods used in studying homelessness. The strategies and methods are defined and described, and much space is given to their role and contribution to our understanding of homelessness.

#### *Causes of Homelessness*

These entries cover the factors and processes that are commonly cited as leading causes of homelessness.

The editors recognize that homelessness has multiple causes, which may vary over time, place, and form of homelessness. The entries define and describe causal factors or processes, review evidence relating them to homelessness, and discuss controversies and implications for preventing homelessness.

#### *Health Issues*

The homeless experience high levels of social, emotional, and physical problems. These entries define and describe these problems, discuss their effects on the homeless, and review the causes of the problems and efforts to eliminate or treat them.

#### *Organizations*

For many centuries, there have been organizations whose missions and activities have an impact on homelessness. The number of such organizations today, their missions, and the issues they address are broader than ever. More than a dozen organizations are covered here, with an emphasis on the issues they address and the services and programs they provide. Inclusion here is not meant to imply that these are the “most important” organizations. While we do include major organizations, the goal is also to include a sampling of organizations that deal with a wide range of issues.

#### *Cities and Nations*

These entries provide summaries of the nature of homelessness in a sample of nations and cities around the world. The entries define homelessness in the national or urban setting being discussed, describe the key features of the homeless population, review causes, and discuss prevention and service initiatives.

#### *Services and Service Settings*

These entries concern service approaches and programs designed to alleviate problems experienced by the homeless and to prevent homelessness. Different approaches and programs aimed at different populations (families, children, men, etc.) are covered, their rationales explained, and research on their effectiveness reviewed.

### *Housing*

As discussed above, housing issues and homelessness are interrelated. These entries focus on housing and its relationship to homelessness, various types of housing and housing programs, and legal and economic issues that influence the interaction between housing and homelessness.

### *Legal Issues, Advocacy, and Policy*

These entries concern policies and initiatives meant to prevent homelessness or to protect or improve the lives of the homeless. The entries define and describe the particular policies and initiatives, and trace their development. Key people and organizations are identified and discussed.

### *Legislation and Programs*

Entries in this category concern the relationship between homelessness and the federal, state, or local governments. The entries cover particular laws and programs and trace their development. Key people and organizations are identified and their roles discussed.

## **ILLUSTRATIVE MATERIAL AND APPENDIXES**

In addition to the entries, the encyclopedia contains sidebars of additional and primary source material, photos and illustrations, and five appendixes. The appendixes are particularly important because they provide additional information that makes this encyclopedia a rich resource on homelessness. In compiling the appendixes, we sought to add material that is not readily or meaningfully available elsewhere and to direct readers to other important resources. The appendixes are:

1. Bibliography of Autobiographical and Fictional Accounts of Homelessness
2. Filmography of American Narrative and Documentary Films about Homelessness
3. Directory of Street Newspapers
4. Documentary History of Homelessness
5. Master Bibliography of Publications on Homelessness

Finally, it needs be mentioned that several navigational aids are provided for users including blind entries, cross-references to entries, a list of entries, a reader's guide to the content, a list of contributors, and a detailed index in Volume II.