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The Impact of Poverty and Homelessness on Child Welfare in Developing Societies: A Social Worker's Perspective

Olawale James Olaogun^{1*}, Abiola Sodiq Adekunle²

¹Department of Adult Education, University of Ibadan Nigeria

²Department of Early Childhood and Educational Foundations, University of Ibadan Nigeria

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*Corresponding author: Olawale James Olaogun
Department of Adult Education, University of Ibadan Nigeria

Abstract

The future of any society lies greatly in the proper mentorship of its younger members to develop them into ideal leaders and responsible individuals. To attain this goal, it is required of societies to ensure provision of adequate welfare services and livable environment to these young generations. However, this has been identified to be a contrast in many societies across developing nations, especially in Africa where children have been identified to be victims of inhumane and tormenting experiences such as hunger, homelessness, malnutrition, emotional abuse, physical assault, bullying and so on. These conditions are traceable to factors like lack of adequate/proper parental care, poverty, unhealthy environment, irresponsible parenthood and overpopulation. The effects of these range from physical defects to psychological trauma, low self-esteem, poor lifestyle, increase in destitution and dependency, value disintegration, increased crime rate, untimely death, poor economic development and so on. This research argued for improved living conditions for poor or homeless children in communities across developing nations as a core requirement to attain meaningful development. The research adopted a combination of research methodologies; the analytic approach was employed to unravel the meaning of key concepts and their interlink with one another; the phenomenological method was adopted to present life experiences of children who have been victims of improper care and unhealthy lifestyle; the prescriptive approach helped to provide some measures to ameliorate the situation in a bid to attain an improved world.

Keywords: Impact, Poverty, Homelessness, Child Welfare, Developing Societies

Introduction

This paper attempted to discuss the welfare of children in developing nations of the world by adopting Nigeria as a springboard. Basically, it posited that children all over the world

are tender beings who require proper care and mentorship to achieve their aims and aspirations; it is therefore required that their welfare should be of utmost priority across all societies. However,

in most developing nations, it has been identified that children's welfare is adversely affected by factors such as poverty and homelessness; poverty as inability of people to afford basic needs (food, clothing and shelter) and homelessness as a reflection of poverty, especially the inability to afford decent shelter. The paper therefore argued that these issues need to be carefully addressed to ensure improved welfare of children; it opined that attempts to attain this would require joint intervention of individuals, parents, government and non-governmental agencies who hold interest of less-advantaged children in high esteem. Some of the identified ways of tackling them include ensuring proper parental care, provision of affordable housing facilities to poor families by government, ensuring adequate support system to poor parents, eradication of illiteracy and ignorance as well as promotion of social intervention programmes for dependent families.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is hinged on the framework of two sociological theories; *Functionalism* and *Welfarism*. Functionalism is conceived as a sociological position that the society can only progress when the various parts/elements function effectively. The theory was propounded by Emile Durkheim in the early 20th century and supported by scholars like Talcot Parsons, Herbert Spencer and Robert Merton. Durkheim posited that the society is a product of inter-relations between various social structures such as institutions, hierarchies and norms and can only run effectively if each of these structures perform its function effectively. (Gomez-Diago, 2019: 1) Related to the main thrust of the paper, it argued that children are one of the core elements of the society whose welfare and development must be sought for them to function effectively and contribute to the smooth running of the society and to have a completely normal society. Once their safety or welfare is jeopardized, the whole society would suffer its consequences in the long term; since unguided children eventually grow up to hunt the society as social miscreants. This has been proven with the experiences of society where social vices are dominant; it is believed that high rate of vices is closely related to value disintegration which in most cases result from poor education or lack of guidance for the youths.

Welfarism on the other hand refers to the theory that well-being or what is good for someone or what makes a life worth living, is the only thing that has intrinsic value. Put differently, welfarism holds that a morally justifiable action is centrally concerned with the welfare or well-being of individuals. It upholds the position that any human action which provides highest amount of welfare for the people is worth commendation. (Keller, 2009) Welfarism theory is traceable to the works of Utilitarian philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. According to Mill, one should embark on actions to produce "the greatest amount of good for the greatest number". (Julia, 2014) Related to the theory of Welfarism, this paper argued that the welfare of children should be the topmost priority of human societies especially developing nations in order to attain development and promote a livable society where all members would be able to achieve their aspirations.

Conceptual Clarification

Poverty

Poverty basically refers to the quality or state of being poor or unable to afford the basic needs of life; food, clothing and shelter. It can also be conceived as the condition in which people or

communities lack the financial resources and necessities for a minimum standard of living such that their basic needs cannot be met. According to United States Department of Health & Human Services (2023), people/families who live in poverty usually live without proper housing, clean water, healthy food, and medical attention. However, it is to be noted that poverty is a social phenomenon whose conception varies from one society to another; this implies that each society has its own standard for assessing poverty such as race, sexual identity, sexual orientation, and little to no access to education, among others. For example, poverty status in the United States is assigned to people who do not meet a certain level of income as set by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the United States Census Bureau is in charge of determining the standard poverty line upon which anyone who falls below is considered poor. Poverty line is calculated by obtaining figures of each country's poverty threshold based on value of the goods needed to sustain one adult and converting it into U.S. dollars. The current international poverty line is \$2.15 per day and given this, about 719 million people are estimated to live in extreme poverty with the United States having the highest score among developed nations. (World Bank, 2023)

According to World Population Review (2023), the countries with the highest poverty rates are South Sudan (82.30%), Equatorial Guinea (76.80%), Madagascar (70.70%), Guinea Bissau (69.30%), and Eritrea (69.00%). The causes of poverty have been identified to be multifaceted; however, the most basic is the inability of individuals to break off from its vicious cycle which is promoted by the society and determined by factors like socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, and geography. It also results from elements like poor economic conditions, illiteracy/ignorance, natural disasters, increased living costs, drug addiction and depression. The impacts of poverty are quite extended and devastating especially on vulnerable population (women and children); children who grow up in poverty suffer from severe health issues such as malnutrition, hormonal imbalance, retarded growth and a range of physical and mental disabilities such as hearing and vision problems. Also, children born into poverty have an increased chance of low birth weight and mortality; it was estimated that there is a high probability of poverty-stricken infants to die in their first month compared to babies born in high-income countries. (World Bank, 2023)

Homelessness

Homelessness can simply be conceived as a state of being unhoused or unsheltered. It is the condition of lacking stable, safe, and functional housing. According to Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) (2024), homeless people include individuals/families who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (such as those living in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or places not originally meant for habitation), people on the verge of losing their primary residence without adequate provisions for replacements, unaccompanied youths (under 25 years of age) or families without ownership interest in a housing unit which can last 60 or more days as well as individuals/family who flee their residence and lack the resources/support networks to obtain other permanent housing.

Similarly, United States Department of Health and Human Services extended the conception of homeless situations to people living on the streets, moving between temporary accommodation living in houses without security of tenure and those sleeping in a public or private place which is not designed for use as a regular

sleeping accommodation for human beings. It also includes those leaving their domiciles because of civil conflict to become refugees within/outside their country. (USDHSS, 2017) According to the United Nations Conference of European Statisticians (CES), homelessness can be classified into two; primary homelessness includes persons living in the streets without a shelter which could qualify for living quarters while secondary homelessness includes persons with no usual residence who move frequently between various types of accommodations such as emergency dwellings or institutions for the homeless. (CES, 2009)

Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1992) noted that homelessness is intricate and cannot be quantified in a literal sense. They conducted a comparison between the conventional and radicalist viewpoints on homelessness; while the conventional definition characterises homelessness as the general state of lacking a residence, the radicalist definition contends that the affordability of a home does not always guarantee shelter. Therefore, it can be argued that individuals residing in a dwelling lacking optimal security and essential amenities can be classified as homeless, as a home is intended to offer refuge and, above all, security. Homeless individuals are those who reside in dwellings that are susceptible to various hazards, threats, and criminal activities. In the long run homelessness can result from factors like lack of affordable housing, poverty, unemployment and traumatic life events and can have debilitating impacts on welfare of concerned individuals. (Crises.Org)

Child Welfare

The attempt to conceptualise this would entail an understanding of the term “child” and “welfare”. A child can be conceived as a young person either male or female who has not yet reached adulthood. On the other hand, welfare refers to the activities that ensure the wellbeing or safety of a person. Thus, child welfare can be conceived as a set of government services designed to protect children and encourage family stability. According to the Centre for Advanced Studies on Child Welfare (2013), child welfare system is a group of public and private services which are dedicated to ensuring that all children live in safe, permanent and stable environment that support their well-being. The goal of child welfare is to promote the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families even among children who enter foster care. It seeks to ensure that children who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing maltreatment achieve safety and well-being. According to ASPE (2024), child welfare is intended to prevent child abuse, protect children by empowering their families while they remain home or provide foster care for children by reuniting them with their families or facilitating adoption for those who cannot be safely reunited with their families.

It is to be noted that child welfare systems vary across societies; while some societies operate private welfare scheme, some operate full scale public scheme. The public welfare system operates at the federal, state and local levels while many private and community-based organisations interact with entire families or focus on direct relation with children. Thus, it is possible that a family whose child (ren) are under child welfare may hold their children at home despite being involved in the scheme and it is also possible for the children to be removed from home temporarily or permanently. (Centre for Advanced Studies on Child Welfare, 2013).

Development

Development simply refers to the process of advancement, growth or change in the situation of a person or object. Similarly, it can be

conceived as a process that creates growth, progress, positive change or the addition of physical, economic, environmental, social and demographic components. (Branch, 2021) Dudley Seers (1969) opined that development is when a country experiences a reduction or elimination of poverty, inequality and unemployment. According to Babie (2016), development is an economic concept that has positive connotations; it involves the application of certain economic and technical measures to utilize available resources to instigate economic growth and improve people’s quality of life. Babie observed that there have been misconceptions between the meaning of economic growth and development; he identified that throughout the 1950s and 1960s, development was largely referred to as economic growth, which meant a quantitative rather than qualitative change in economic performance. (Babie, 2016) Similarly, Branch (2021) identified that the purpose of development is a rise in the level and quality of life of the population, as well as the creation or expansion of local regional income and employment opportunities, without damaging the resources of the environment. He concluded that development includes an aspect of quality change and the creation of conditions for a continuation of that change.

Developing Countries

The term is generally used to describe a nation that is just developing or one with a low level of material well-being. It can simply be referred to as a poor country which is seeking to expand its economy. Basically, there is no generally acceptable definition of developing country since levels of development vary widely among various countries. Based on this, a developing country can be conceived as a country with less developed economy with smaller gross domestic product (GDP), gross national product (GNP) and per capita income (PCI) compared to other countries. According to IGI Global (2023), developing countries refer to low and middle-income generating countries (LMIC) that are relatively less developed with low industrial base and low human development index (HDI) compared to developed countries. A low HDI score means that the citizens of a particular country have lower life expectancy, lower educational attainment, lower per capita incomes, and higher fertility rates than found in other countries. Based on this, the characteristics of a developing country include low level of human capital, high level of poverty and malnutrition, high population growth rates; prevalence of subsistence agriculture and dominance of informal sector. (IGI Global, 2023)

Moving further, the World Bank considers all low- and middle-income countries as “developing”. In its most recent classification, economies are divided using Gross National Income per capita. In 2022, countries with GNI per capita below US\$1,135 were considered developing. Based on this classification, a list of developing countries was drafted by the World Bank which contains about 154 countries and cuts across most parts of Africa, bits of Europe, Asia and America. Some of the countries identified include Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belarus, Benin, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Congo, Cote d’Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jamaica, Kenya, Kiribati, Korea, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Philippines, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South

Africa, Sudan, Syria, Tanzania, Thailand, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, Uruguay, Venezuela, Vietnam, Yugoslavia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, etc. (World Bank, 2023)

Poverty and its Impacts on Child's Welfare in Africa

The impact of poverty in Africa has been described as multifarious given the fact that it is a continent with the highest number of developing nations. According to a study conducted by De Milliano and Ilze (2018), a significant proportion of children (specifically 67%) in thirty sub-Saharan African nations experience multidimensional poverty; that is, the absence of two to five fundamental components of child well-being (nutrition, health, education, information, water, sanitation, and housing) as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In a survey conducted by STATS South Africa (2015), it was determined that a minimum of 50.1% of children residing in homes of about seven or more individuals can be classified as poor and up to 85.9% of children in Africa fall into this category.

With regards to Nigeria, child poverty is prevalent in rural areas, with almost 90% of rural children experiencing poverty. The Nigeria Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) indicates that two-thirds (67.5%) of children between 0-17 years in Nigeria can be classified as multidimensionally poor. Summarily, children make up half (51%) of all individuals living in poverty in Nigeria. Across the geo-political zones, the child Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) shows higher poverty in the North-East and North-West (where 90% of children are poor) and lower poverty in the South-East and South-West (74% and 65.1% respectively). The incidence of Child MPI is above 50% in all States and greater than 95% in Bayelsa, Sokoto, Gombe and Kebbi. Four million Nigerians (2.1% of the population) live with a child aged 15–17 who is the first generation in that household to have completed primary school. (The Nigeria MPI, 2022) Based on this, it is important to identify some of the effects of poverty on children welfare.

A significant number of children experience the detrimental effects of poverty which impacts their overall welfare in terms of physical, emotional and social domains. The National Bureau of Statistics reported that 65% of the population, which amounts to 133 million individuals, are classified as multidimensionally poor. This corroborates the World Bank (2024) that:

Around 700 million people live today in extreme poverty since they live on less than \$2.15 per day which is below the extreme poverty line. After several decades of continuous global poverty reduction, a period of significant crises and shocks resulted in three years of lost progress between 2020-2022. Low-income countries, increase during this period, have not yet recovered. In 2022, a total of 712 million people globally were living in extreme poverty, an increase of 23 million people compared to 2019.

It could be identified that poverty serves as an impediment to the healthy development of children. The physical health of children is significantly affected by poverty, resulting in immediate consequences for their overall well-being. Access to effective healthcare, preventive measures such as immunisations, and essential treatment for illnesses is constrained by limited financial means; hence children from low-income families are more vulnerable to chronic health issues and experience stunted physical

growth. Moreover, poverty often translates to food insecurity, and children who experience insufficient or imbalanced dietary intake are susceptible to malnutrition: a condition that can have enduring consequences on their cognitive abilities and general growth.

Poverty also leads to the concentration of families in communities characterised by inadequate housing, insufficient sanitary facilities, and heightened exposure to environmental pollutants, hence exacerbating the risks to their overall well-being. The United States Census Bureau reported that the population of poor children in the United States has continued to experience an unthinkable rise since 2000; the number of children living in poverty increased from 11.6 million in 2000 to 13.3 million in 2007 while the proportion of children residing in households with earnings below the poverty threshold rose from 16.2 percent to 18.0 percent. With these statistics, it's evident that poverty is a global social problem, as it does not only affect the developing nations, but the globe at large.

Similarly, poor children experience myriads of social issues and psychological challenges throughout their formative years. Due to high chances of exposure to hunger, poor housing and clothing and lack of social support, they may develop inferiority complex as well as pessimistic attitude to life compared to their wealthier counterparts. Also, the exposure to environmental stress, violence and family issues may have detrimental effects on their mental, emotional and social well-being in the long run. Research indicates that children in urban areas characterised by poverty, violence, deteriorating housing and disrupted living conditions face a heightened susceptibility to depression, diminished self-assurance, and interpersonal conflicts with peers and authority figures (Huston, 1991). Similarly, the persistent burden of economic adversity can exacerbate levels of stress in children and result to the phenomena sometimes referred to as "toxic stress." Closely related to this, poverty within a child's family may result to persistent pressure or strained relationship within domestic setting which can detrimentally affect a child's emotional growth and heighten the likelihood of mental health issues like anxiety or depression. In addition, children who are living in poverty may experience feelings of guilt or isolation as a result of their circumstances, which can result in withdrawal from social interactions.

Poverty also has a lasting effect on the academic achievement of children as they are placed at an undue advantage compared to their rich counterparts right from early life stage. Children hailing from economically disadvantaged households frequently attend schools that possess limited resources, higher class sizes, and teachers with lower qualifications. In addition, the persistent stress linked to poverty gives rise to a learning environment that is filled with difficulties. Factors such as hunger, precarious living situations, and parental emotional burden can impede a child's capacity to concentrate and retain information. This educational disadvantage can result in academic difficulties and an increased likelihood of complete dropout. The global population of children and adolescents aged 6 to 18 who were out of school in 2021 amounted to around 244 million individuals (UNESCO, 2022). In the long run, poverty also drives children to associate with deviant groups such as cultists, drug addicts and prostitutes in a bid to seek a means of survival. It is therefore no strange news to associate increased crime rate to poverty. In conclusion, poverty has continued to constitute a great threat to the welfare of children and must be proactively combated if improved welfare is to be achieved.

The Impact of Homelessness on Child Welfare in Africa

The condition of homelessness, simply determined by the absence of permanent and secure housing, significantly impacts negatively on various dimensions of a child's existence. Parsell and Parsell (2012) argued that the term homeless persons are those who either make deliberate and unethical decisions to be homeless or helpless individuals who lack the ability to make choices. Attempts to quantify the homeless population are well recognised as challenging and occasionally controversial (Rossi, 1989). In 2005, a report submitted to the UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) by a 'Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living' revealed that around 100 million individuals globally lack a suitable dwelling. The number of individuals living in substandard housing exceeds 1 billion (UNCHR, 2005). Despite the global importance attached to ensuring safety and welfare of children, the allocation of resources towards their maintenance is quite low in majority of African nations such that it is hardly reflected in both national and international statistical data. Thus, it is important to analyse the diverse consequences of homelessness on the well-being of children, specifically focusing on its influence on their physical and emotional health, cognitive development, and academic achievements.

The immediate ramifications of homelessness manifest in the form of a potential risk to a child's bodily well-being. Homeless households frequently face a dearth of access to nourishing sustenance, uncontaminated water, and adequate cleanliness, hence heightening their susceptibility to illness and malnutrition. The unequal provision of shelter exposes individuals to adverse weather conditions and environmental risks, hence exacerbating the risks to their physical health. According to World Population Review (2024), Nigeria tops the list of the countries with the most elevated levels of homelessness in the year 2023 with about 24 million homeless residents. The countries with the highest rates of homelessness in 2023 include: Nigeria (24,400,000), Pakistan (20,000,000), Egypt (12,000,000), Syria (6,568,000), DR Congo (5,332,000), Bangladesh (5,000,000), Colombia (4,943,000), Afghanistan (4,660,000), Philippines (4,500,000), Yemen (3,858,000). (World Population Review, 2024).

The impact of homelessness on children is also profound in terms of emotional distress. The persistent strain of unpredictability, along with the apprehension of being forced to leave one's home and the negative perception linked to homelessness, can result in the development of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). According to WHO (2023), "feelings of excessive guilt or low self-worth" and "disrupted sleep" are symptoms of depression. Given the societal segregation of homeless and underprivileged individuals, they often experience a decline in their self-esteem and engage in social comparisons with others who have a more affluent lifestyle; these thoughts contribute to the development of depression.

The cognitive development of a child is also disrupted by homelessness. The perpetual state of change and the absence of a consistent educational setting provide challenges for children in maintaining their concentration on academic tasks. The cognitive capacities and scholastic performance of those experiencing homelessness might be impeded by factors such as sleep deprivation, starvation, and emotional distress. Studies indicate that

children who are homeless have a higher probability of encountering developmental delays and achieving worse scores in standardised examinations compared to their counterparts who are sheltered. Discussing further on its impact on educational achievement of children, it is argued that due to homelessness, the academic progress of students can be disrupted and educational gaps can arise as a result of frequent school changes resulting from family migration. The absence of a fixed residential address might provide challenges for individuals in terms of school registration and access to after-school programmes that provide essential academic assistance. These circumstances contribute to elevated rates of student attrition among homeless individuals, hence constraining their prospects for the future.

In addition, homelessness exposes children to economic exploitation which manifests in form of child labour, child trafficking, drug peddling, prostitution and so on. Due to the harsh economic situation of many African societies, homeless children are conditioned to engage in these activities as means of survival. It has been argued that despite the commitment made by the majority of African nations to prioritise the welfare of children., (as outlined in the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child), approximately 80 million children in Africa are compelled to reside in conditions that necessitate their engagement in labour for their sustenance, usually without enough protection and frequently on urban streets, lacking access to suitable housing (Ochola, 1996). This denotes that homelessness undermines their feeling of safety, puts their well-being at risk and obstructs their chances for proper welfare and future development.

Moving further, the ramifications of homelessness on child welfare extend beyond its social implications, encompassing substantial economic implications. Research has indicated that children who encounter homelessness exhibit a higher propensity necessitating special education assistance and face an elevated likelihood of becoming entangled in the criminal justice system throughout their later years. This is because many homeless children are exposed to inhumane treatment such as starvation, bullying, harassment and sexual abuse which can trigger violent tendencies in them or lead them to embrace crime. Thus, homelessness can be said to contribute to increased tendency of crime in the society.

In the long run, homelessness results to increased burden on social services and available public resources. It could be argued that facilities such as health care, electricity, water and transport services are basic needs for all members of the society. However, despite not been included in the budgeted users of these services, homeless individuals usually benefit from them thereby placing extra burden on these services and increasing government expenditures. In conclusion, homelessness is a serious issue which contributes to social imbalance in the African society alongside poverty. Thus, there is a need to ensure that they are properly addressed in order to ensure improved welfare of citizens.

Combating Poverty and Homelessness in Developing Societies: A Panacea for Improving Children Welfare

It is evident that poverty and homelessness are intertwined issues that plague not only the developing societies, but the globe at large. Although the precise factors may vary among different areas, their influence is unquestionable. It is identifiable that homelessness is a threatening phenomenon even in the United States; in a report by the US Government Accountability Office (GAO), the number of

individuals experiencing homelessness in the US in 2022 exceeded 580,000. According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD):

In the U.S., about 1 in 10 young adults and 1 in 30 minors under age 18 experience homelessness without a parent or caregiver over the course of a year. Homelessness is higher among some groups, such as youth of color and transgender youth (GAO, 2021).

In tackling this menace, GAO (2021) reported that the Departments of Housing and Urban Development and Health and Human Services have been allocating money to local organisations for the purpose of operating programmes such as shelters or transitional living programmes. Based on this, it is imperative of the government to develop and implement similar welfare programmes which may help mitigate the effects of poverty and homelessness.

Similarly, addressing poverty and homelessness necessitates the implementation of a comprehensive approach that effectively tackles the underlying causes. The allocation of resources towards education and skills training initiatives enables individuals to attain higher-paying employment opportunities and disrupt the perpetuation of poverty. Microfinance efforts have the potential to facilitate capital accessibility for small firms, promoting entrepreneurial activities and generating novel employment prospects for citizens to grant them opportunities to rise out of poverty.

It is imperative for governments and NGOs to cooperate in order to create housing solutions that are both sustainable and cheap. This may entail advocating for collaborations between the public and private sectors, fostering inventive construction methods, and enforcing rent control policies in regions prone to displacement. The Nigerian government has previously adopted the construction of low-cost housing estates at both federal and state levels. It is suggested that such steps should be revisited, reviewed and properly re-implemented to help improve citizens' welfare. Rwanda has also implemented a national housing program that aims to construct 100,000 affordable housing units by 2024 while Ghana has launched initiatives to build low-cost housing units and provide access to affordable mortgages. In addition, implementation of the extensive shelter initiative in Morocco since the time of the COVID-19 pandemics has tremendously helped to improve citizen's life. It was identified that the Moroccan government provided housing for almost 6,300 individuals without homes and facilitated the reunion of 2,000 others with their families. Following the implementation of this initiative, there has been a significant reduction in the number of homeless individuals in the country. Also, Queyranne (2023) asserts that this programme has transformed the living conditions of many citizens such that in 2014, poverty rate in the country became considerably low compared to other nations in the region with her increased gross domestic product (GDP) per capita. Similarly, in observance of World Homeless Day on October 10, Kate Mlauzi from the South African Institute of International Affairs recommended government's provision of homeless shelters as a pathway to address homelessness. She argued:

South Africa has the option to implement a 'housing first approach', which involves providing home-based services to assist individuals in stabilizing and maintaining their homes or providing financial assistance for private housing. The government should formulate and execute policies aimed at enhancing housing

prospects for individuals experiencing homelessness. Additionally, it should guarantee that institutions like homeless shelters which do not release individuals without a bit feasible housing strategy, such as facilitating the reconnection of homeless individuals with their families.

In addition, there is a need to ensure provision of adequate welfare services and relief materials for people displaced or rendered homeless as a result of man-made phenomenon such as war, and conflict or natural disasters such as famine, flood or pestilence. According to United Hands Relief and Development (UHR) (2021):

More than six million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Food security remains a problem in Kenya; at least two million people are at risk of malnutrition and diseases. Nearly one million people are displaced due to conflict in Ethiopia. The country also suffers from food insecurity, leaving millions of civilians hungry. With several years of ongoing conflict, almost five million people are facing extreme hunger in Sudan and over 60 percent of the population is in need of emergency humanitarian assistance," (UHR, 2021)

In order to tackle the menace of poverty and homelessness in many families in Somalia, Kenya, and Ethiopia, UHR collaborates with local NGOs. This assistance encompasses essential provisions such as potable water, sanitation facilities, hygiene practices, sustenance, and housing. Efforts are underway to implement enduring development strategies aimed at assisting communities in managing the ongoing famine, recurrent droughts, and climate fluctuations. Closely related to this, the implementation of robust social welfare programs play pivotal roles in offering a vital cushion for individuals experiencing economic adversity. Preventing the escalation of temporary setbacks into homelessness can be achieved through the implementation of conditional cash transfers, unemployment benefits, and subsidised healthcare. Developing nations should allocate resources towards gathering dependable statistics regarding the scope and characteristics of homelessness. For instance, Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Program has helped millions of chronically food-insecure households by providing cash or food in exchange for public works participation. The aforementioned data can be utilised to develop focused interventions and monitor advancements in other developing nations. Similarly, Ghana has implemented social protection programs, such as the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) program, which provides cash transfers to households living in extreme poverty. The primary goal of the LEAP Program is to alleviate poverty by enhancing and stabilizing consumption and facilitating access to services and opportunities for those who are extremely impoverished and vulnerable. The program has achieved notable progress. As of December 31, 2015, the number of households receiving benefits has risen from 1,645 in 2008 to 146,074, spread throughout 185 districts. The Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection in the Republic of Ghana collaborated with the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) at the University of Ghana, Legon, and North Carolina University in 2012 to conduct an impact assessment of the LEAP program. The assessment revealed a positive effect on the extremely impoverished population in Ghana. Hence, LEAP is effectively reaching the most economically disadvantaged families in Ghana and is significantly improving the overall welfare of the targeted households. This, it is argued that

promotion of such programmes would help citizens overcome poverty and homelessness in no time.

On another note, there is need for governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the commercial sector, and community organisations to collaborate in order to develop a comprehensive strategy on measures to improve citizens' welfare. This necessitates cultivating a culture that promotes the exchange of knowledge, collaborative planning, and the mobilisation of resources for improvement of the economy and general welfare of all citizens.

In order to effectively address poverty and homelessness, it is necessary to have higher-paying and more stable employment opportunities. By providing sufficient employment possibilities, individuals are afforded the opportunity to transition out of homelessness. One way to accomplish this is by advocating for transitional jobs, subsidized jobs, career programs, and social businesses that provide integrated social support for individuals who encounter significant obstacles to finding employment. In the long run, there is a need for allocation of resources to early childhood education, providing accessible healthcare, and implementing assistance initiatives for low-income families to foster disruption of the cycle of poverty and guarantee equal opportunities for all children to flourish.

Conclusion

Childhood is a phase characterised by significant maturation and advancement; it is a phase which ought to be a moment of education, exploration, and happiness. However, due to harrowing experience of poverty and homelessness in Africa, a lot of children are denied these pleasant experiences. The influence of poverty and homelessness on the well-being of children is a varied and intricate matter that necessitates a complete comprehension of the diverse elements involved. Numerous studies have consistently demonstrated that children who reside in impoverished conditions or encounter homelessness encounter substantial obstacles in their physical, emotional, and cognitive growth. These children exhibit a higher propensity for experiencing malnutrition, unfavourable health outcomes, victimization, domestic abuse, sexual violence and limited access to crucial services, including healthcare and high-quality education. The resulting impacts of these problems manifest in heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and behavioural issues which usually have long-term implications for the child's future well-being and integration into society. It is argued that the task of addressing poverty and homelessness in developing cultures is a multifaceted endeavour which requires combined efforts of government, private institutions and non-governmental organisations to improve the status quo. To achieve a future where all individuals have access to adequate welfare and satisfactory housing, we must prioritise economic empowerment, cheap housing, social safety nets, and gender equality. The implementation of a comprehensive strategy, along with rigorous data gathering and cooperative efforts, holds the potential to bring about a more optimistic outlook for individuals who are most susceptible.

Recommendations

Since it has been proven that the well-being of a child is substantially impacted by poverty and homelessness. The following recommendations are made:

- The government should allocate resources towards the establishment and upkeep of affordable housing alternatives, enabling families to attain secured living conditions.
- Social safety net initiatives such as food stamps and temporary aid should be bolstered.
- There should also be an expansion in the availability of standard early childhood education programmes, providing a secure and engaging setting for the growth and development of young children.
- The government should also provide training to educators, social workers, and healthcare personnel in the field of trauma-informed care, with the aim of effectively addressing the emotional consequences experienced by children affected by poverty and homelessness.
- The objective is to guarantee affordable healthcare access for children who are facing poverty and homelessness, encompassing both physical and mental health assistance.
- Government and other relevant agencies should contemplate on establishing initiatives aimed at providing parents experiencing poverty and homelessness with the necessary tools and competencies to effectively navigate difficulties and promote the overall welfare of their children.
- Furthermore, there should be agencies aimed at facilitating the connection between homeless families and vital resources such as shelters, vocational training, and addiction treatment.
- Poverty alleviation schemes aimed at tackling the underlying factors contributing to poverty, such as increasing the minimum wage and enhancing opportunities for vocational education should be established.

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