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The New Face of Homelessness in Perth: the victims of the economic boom.

Are they being included in the existing support programs for homelessness?

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This thesis is presented a part of the Master of Arts in Community Development at Murdoch University.

I declare that this dissertation is my own account of my research. It contains as its main content which has not been previously submitted for a degree at any university.

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Signe

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Abstract

Homelessness is far from being a static phenomenon; it is forever changing due to different causes and associated characteristics. In recent years, new groups have emerged that contribute to the population of homeless, and in some cases these groups have escaped through gaps in the network of existing social support systems. This seems to be the case for those who have become victims of the last two decades of prosperity in the Perth metropolitan area.

The economic growth in Western Australia has attracted many people looking for better opportunities, both professionally and in their lifestyle choices. This population increase has caused damage as well as many benefits. One is a shortage of houses availability, and the subsequent rise on the housing market prices, especially affecting those on low and moderate incomes (Shelter WA, 2012; Department of Housing, 2010; Burk, 2011). Many of the people who are reduced to homelessness, do not fit into the typical image of the homelessness, reported in the studies conducted by scholars. Homelessness is usually associated with addiction, domestic or youth violence (Homelessness Taskforce, 2008), and now surprisingly, some middle class families and employed people with low and moderate incomes are becoming priority target groups for support programs (WA Government Department of Child Protection, 2010). However, there are identified deficiencies in support programs, so these people are double victims; victims of the high price of housing, which exacerbates the effects of a life shock on the homeless, but also victims of a lack of support by homelessness services.

There is a need for specific responses to particular, individual problems, in order to support those at risk of homelessness, and there is a need for effective preventative measures. Studies from different authors show that the development of the community housing sector (Gilmour, 2013), an increase in incomes (O'Flaherty, 2009), a more articulate support system from social services (Wiesel et al., 2013), and the inclusion of specific measures to protect this group on the existing prevention programs (Culhane et al., 2011), could be important steps in protecting them.

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1. Introduction

The homeless population today is not the same as two decades ago. A new generation of excluded people, resulting from economic factors, crisis of values, unemployment, and victimisation of new social policies, have joined the classic marginalised; the beggars and vagabonds. Since the eighties, homelessness has been recognised as a priority for change for Australian policy makers, important enough to initiate a national consensus. The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) in 1985, 'The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness', (Homelessness Taskforce, 2008) and the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (the NPAH), were all agreed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in late 2008.

Moreover, in Australia, scholars have increased their interest in the subject and the volume of studies from the 1980s onwards, with particular emphasis by such authors as Chamberlain and MacKenzie, and institutions such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) at RMIT University. Under their sponsorship, these institutions made possible the realisation of many studies on the subject of homelessness, conducted within the last thirty years, and helped develop a consensual definition of homelessness in the Australian context.

Despite all efforts and studies to understand the phenomenon of homelessness, the figures presented by the 2011 Census (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2011) and the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2013), show that the goal of halving overall homelessness by 2020, proposed by the programs mentioned above, and offering supported accommodation to all rough sleepers by 2020, (Homelessness Taskforce, 2008) are far from being achieved. In some cases, this is due to the unexpected emergence of new groups of homeless people.

Through a literature review, this research aims to explain the development of one of these new groups; the one affected by the impact of the shortage of affordable housing available for low and medium incomes in the metropolitan area of Perth. Due to the economic boom in recent years, the Perth region has attracted a large number of people from interstate and overseas (ABS, 2013). While on the one hand, a growing population adds some vibrancy to the city, but for some people the move west has not provided all of the positive benefits expected.

O’Flaherty’s *Economic Theory of Homeless and Housing* (1995) forms the theoretical framework for this research. In this model, homelessness is presented as the sum of a permanent component—the average price and availability of housing—and a transitory component representing the vicissitudes of the moment, or what the author describes as live shocks; the worst of them is income volatility (O’Flaherty, 2009, p.7). This model has the advantage of acknowledging causes which include both individual choices (agency) and structural factors.

This project is presented over six sections. In the next section, homelessness is defined, which is followed by the characterisation of the homeless population and an explanation of the determinants of homelessness. The next part of the project outlines the characteristics of agency and structure, in order to provide a basis to the introduction of two integrative models, which emphasise the importance of the interactions between macro structures, such as the rental market, and micro processes which render individuals vulnerable to homelessness (Scutella and Johnson, 2013).

Subsequently, an overview of the existing responses to homelessness in Australia is given, with focus on the Perth metropolitan area and special emphasis on the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (Council of Australian Governments, 2012), the Affordable Housing Strategy 2010-2020, (WA Government Department of Housing, 2010) and the Opening Doors to Address Homelessness (WA Government Department of Child Protection, 2010). The first is a nationwide initiative, and the following are state programs relating to WA.

The final section provides some recommendations on how this specific group might be better assisted, through the implementation of community housing programs that protect those who are vulnerable to homelessness from sudden changes in the housing market. The suggestion of increasing incomes is provided, which might help

those at risk of homelessness deal with life shocks without resorting to the streets; better service coordination could make easier the life of people struggling, and the responses less bureaucratic. Finally, some suggestions are given that might be implemented in the Western Australian Department of Housing's Opening Doors Program in order to make the actual state plan to address homelessness, more efficient and adjusted to this type of clientele.

2. Definition

There is not a homogeneous definition of homelessness in the world, rather there are many different ones which reflect the complex realities of people without shelter in different regions of the world. Classifying levels of homelessness brings many problems because these categories assume considerable political sensitiveness in that it defines who is going to receive support and what kind of support may be offered. The fact that there are so many factors that influences the phenomenon does not make it easier to address. Changes to family structure, individual characteristics, economic factors, different perception from one society to another, or natural disasters, are all factors that can influence the way the phenomenon is understood in different places and by different people (Springer, 2000).

The definitions around homelessness in an international context, have evolved from the basic notion of a lack of a roof to sleep, as used in the Human Global Report Settlements (UN Habitat, 1996), to definitions that included the risk factor, where, if people are not living in secure places, they are considered homeless, and on to the European Typology of Homelessness developed by FIANTSA (the European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless) since 2006. The latter is a more qualitative oriented definition, including the concepts of rooflessness, homelessness, insecure accommodation and living in inadequate housing (FEANTSA, 2014).

In Australia, definitions of homelessness also evolved from the 1970s when, similar to other nations, homelessness became more apparent (Scutella and Johnson, 2012). There was a need to operationalize the concept of homelessness, since the counting process fed into the way services for the homeless operated in different

states and determined who received support and what type of support would be provided.

In 2008 the Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] moved towards a definition based on the Cultural Definition of Homelessness from Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2008). This emphasised the lack of home, and included elements such as: a sense of security, stability, privacy, safety, and the ability to control living space. Homelessness is therefore a lack of one or more of the elements that represent 'home'. According to the ABS model, a person is considered homeless if their current living arrangement: is in a dwelling that is inadequate; or has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations (ABS, 2012).

Those aspects are reflected in the three categories of homelessness used by the Australian definition. The first is termed: primary homelessness, which includes all people without conventional accommodation; such as people living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting in derelict buildings, or using cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter. Secondary homelessness includes people who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another; and tertiary homelessness refers to people who live in boarding houses on a medium to long-term basis, operationally defined as 13 weeks or longer. They are homeless because their accommodation situation is below the minimum community standard of a small self-contained flat (ABS, 2012, pp. 38-39).

People must fit in one of these categories to be considered a homeless person. However, in some cases it is not automatically considered that the person is homeless as some people choose to live in small dwellings or stay with friends, or travel in caravans. Those people live in such conditions, but they have the choice to access more secure accommodation having the financial, physical, psychological and personal means to access these alternatives.

The ABS definition does not include people who are at risk of homelessness, but Centrelink and other agencies consider the existence of two groups: 'homeless' and 'at risk of homelessness', identifying clients who have not been categorised as homeless, but nevertheless have characteristics similar to those who have been. This captures people such as victims of domestic violence who remain in the same house

as the perpetrator, or the marginally housed, persons who are in housing that meets the minimum community standard but face a degree of uncertainty about their future housing arrangements (Chigavazira, et al., 2013).

3. Characterisation

The counting of the homelessness population has been considered difficult to be made with accuracy by the ABS. Homelessness is a condition that may have been influenced by many different factors or determinants, it is almost impossible to have an exact figure using the normal statistical methods. The ABS (2012) explain that homelessness is not a characteristic that is directly collected in the Census of Population and Housing, and the results presented are merely estimates of the homeless population derived from analytical techniques based on both the characteristics observed in the Census and assumptions about the way people may respond to Census questions, in some cases people may deny their situation or because their housing situation may not even be questioned by the services (ABS^a, 2012, pp: 5-6).

Another limitation from the numbers derived from the Census is that they just represent the situation of how many people experienced homelessness at a particular point-in-time (the night of the Census). Homelessness is not a static phenomenon, many people go in and out of homelessness during their life, as demonstrated by the ABS itself by stating that, between 2001 and 2011 about 1.1 million Australians experienced at least in one moment of their lives, an episode of homelessness (ABS^b, 2012).

Despite these limitations, the results from ABS and the Specialist Services Agencies are probably the most reliable ones, with the advantage that they can be compared over time to track increases or decreases in homelessness.

In the Australian context, it was estimated that in 2013 around 244,000 Australians accessed specialist homelessness services, which provide a wide range of services to people who are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness (Homelessness Australia, 2013). These services, of which there are around 1500 registered across the country, can include: accommodation or assistance with obtaining or maintaining

housing, basic support services (such as meals, assistance with transport, material aid or recreational services), and more specialised services (including specialised counselling and support for health and mental health issues, professional legal services, and financial advice and counselling) (AIHW, 2013). This figure represents an increase of 3% compared with 2011, and included 112 240 (46%) that were already homeless. The rest were considered at risk clients (Homelessness Australia, 2013).

These numbers represent a trend of stable growth that is also reflected in the results of the 2011 Census, when more than 105,200 Australians were experiencing homelessness, an increase of 8% since 2006 (ABS ^a, 2012).

Both results show that the majority of the homelessness population are men, born in Australia (not an Indigenous or Torres Strait Islander Australian), aged between 19 and 34 years old, staying in severe overcrowded dwellings (39%) or supported accommodation for the homeless (20%), and living in New South Wales or in the Victoria region. The main reasons presented when seeking assistance were related to domestic violence and housing affordability (financial difficulties, rents too high, housing crisis), 20% in each case. The majority presents to the services alone but the ones that come in family group are increasing (ABS, 2012; AIHW, 2013).

In 2012–13, \$27.5 million in financial assistance was provided by specialist homelessness agencies to enable clients to access services—an average of \$521 per client who received financial assistance. Most financial assistance was directed to clients to establish or maintain a tenancy— \$14.2 million in total—averaging \$741 per client who received this type of assistance (AIHW, 2013).

These numbers reflect the impact of homelessness in the Australian families, and dismiss part of the idea that homelessness in Australia is a mere problem of immigrants, Aboriginal people, or moral degenerates. Families, including small children are facing gradually more problems, children under 12 years old represent 17% of all homeless, and women are in majority (62%) in the at risk population (AIHW, 2013).

4. Determinants

To be able to respond effectively to the situation of the homeless it is necessary to know their causes, but these are not always linear, objective, and independent.

There are many risk factors for a person to fall into a situation of homelessness such as: domestic violence, end a relationship, lack of skills, unemployment, substance dependence, mental health, physical health, contact with the criminal justice system, financial difficulties and debts, and the loss of social and family network, and institutionalization (Chigavazira, et al., 2013, pp: 4-5).

Homelessness may be as a result of multiple factors, which are more or less valuable depending on the conception that one has of the situation. According to Shinn (1997), the situation of homelessness can be conceptualized as a permanent trait that derives from individual characteristics, or as a temporary state which people go through. If considered as a trait, homelessness can be expected to endure, that individual differences in predisposition can be easily identified, and that people with the trait of homelessness have a high chance of becoming homeless in a recurring manner.

On the other hand, homelessness can be seen as a state in which one is caught. In this case it is believed that might be induced by environmental conditions, possibly in interaction with personal characteristics, and should cease as the circumstances improve, being susceptible to policy interventions that modify these causal circumstances (Shinn, 1997). These two conceptualizations suggest that when homelessness is viewed as a trait it assumes that the factors that cause homelessness are of an individual nature; and when homelessness is conceptualized as a state the underlying factors are mainly structural or institutional. When one considers that the situation of homelessness is due to individual factors, this is to assume that people fall into homelessness due to personal inadequacies or failures in which may or may not be responsible (Meert et al., 2004).

When taking into account the structural and institutional factors this is to look beyond the individual and to take into account the organization of society itself, the

wider economic and social context, including not only the availability of suitable habitation but also the obstacles to community participation (Meert et al., 2004).

4.1. Agency

The theories around human agency or individual factors explain homelessness as the result of individual activity in the construction of one's social reality. The individual factors that appear most commonly associated with homelessness are:

a) Break in social networks: separation, divorce, family rejection are important factors that cause many to become homeless, with the most dramatic being violence within the household (Meert et al., 2005). The domestic violence is a situation that leads many women to have to choose between living in an abusive relationship, or even death, and homelessness. Although this choice is limited due to lack of resources on the part of women to leave the house, some do not always do so. Sometimes social and family pressure can contribute to the situation which perpetuates in time. Besides women, another group seriously affected by domestic violence is youth. According to O'Connell (2003), family conflicts are always the underlying issue when looking for the reasons why young people leave home.

Despite the higher proportion of men among the homeless in resource-rich countries, the majority of families experiencing homelessness in these countries comprise women and their children (Kirkman et al., 2014). In Australia, about 32% of all those seeking help from specialist homelessness services presented in families, most of which comprised a single adult, usually female. The most common reason given for seeking assistance with housing was domestic and family violence, accounting for almost a quarter of applicants (AIHW, 2013).

b) Mental Health issues: people with mental health problems are a special group among the population of homeless. They represented 20% of all clients of specialist services in 2012 (AIHW, 2013). Its prevalence among the homeless population is higher than among the non-homeless, and although they are far from being the largest group among the homeless, people with mental health problems are one of the groups with greater visibility because they are often visible within the community (Johnson et al., 2008).

Mental perturbations prevent people from fulfilling essential aspects of everyday life, as self-care, household management, or social relations, usually considered protective factors, put these people at higher risk, not only to become homeless, but also to come out of the situation of homeless. Compared with all clients from the specialists services they were more likely to have longer periods of support and to be accommodated for longer periods (AIHW, 2012) find it harder to find jobs, make new friends, have lower physical health, and have more often contacts with the judicial system, and spend more time hospitalised (Tsemberis et al., 2003).

Physical illness is also considered a risk factor. According to Scrutela et al. (2012) and Chigavazira et al. (2013) there is a higher incidence of chronic illness on new homeless compared and for many homeless people their health deteriorates significantly during their homeless experience. This relationship is understandable if one considers that adverse conditions often involve significant changes in lifestyle, and often exposure to disease which can affect all areas of the a person's life, including socioeconomic status (reduced ability to obtain revenues and increased spending on health) and interpersonal relationships. Indeed people with health problems face more barriers to obtaining and maintaining employment due to their limitations and are more vulnerable to poverty and its consequences.

d) Dependence / substance abuse research usually refer to the existence of high rates among the homeless (Vangeest and Johnson, 2002). Characterizing a dependence on the continued use of the substance, strong desire to consume, difficulty controlling consumption, neglect of other activities to promote the use and demand of substance, is easy to realize that distracts people from stability oriented activities, the level of work is lower, resulting in lower yields, and increases the risk of job loss, family separation and social withdrawal. All the above mentioned factors increase the risk of eviction for people who are in precarious housing situation, and that combined with poverty, increases the likelihood of a person becoming homeless (Orwin et al., 2005).

Another factor that contributes to substance abusers becoming homelessness and remain in that condition for long periods, especially those who passed from youth to adult homelessness, is because they tend to engage in the homeless

subculture. That is a subculture where drug use is a form of initiation into the homeless culture, giving them a sense of belonging to a group, and at the same time works as a coping response for the emotions and feelings that came from their reality (Chamberlain and Johnson, 2011).

According to Chamberlain and Johnson (2011) in this pathway the theory of social adaptation is partially right: accordingly, they found that 86% of the participants that were homeless and drug users did not have a continuous experience of homelessness, rather two or more episodes of homelessness intercalated by periods out of homeless. The authors claim that this suggests some exaggeration of the social adaptation theory in the extent to which people on the substance abuse accept homelessness as a way of life. It shows that people will try to leave homelessness if the opportunity exists. On the other hand however, Chamberlain and Johnson (2011) agree with social adaptation theory that the longer period of substance abuse the harder it is to abandon homelessness.

e) Ethnicity: there is a high representation of ethnic minorities among the population of homeless (AIHW^b, 2013). In the 2011 Census, 669,900 people, or 3% of the total Australian population, were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ABS, 2011) but they represented 22% of the clients which search for assistance from the homeless specialist services. From those more than a half was already experiencing a situation of homelessness. It is interesting to note that in the age groups between 18 and 34 years old, women represent more than 65% of cases, and probably that is a consequence of the fact that the main reason for people search for help among the services was domestic violence (22%), which affect mostly women and children. The other two reasons were financial difficulties (14%) and inadequate or inappropriate dwelling conditions (14%) (AIHW^a, 2013).

Also looking for the subgroup of people born overseas, they are, in general, sub represented in the service statistics, but many cases begin to arise, especially in urban areas, of overseas people living in severe overcrowded dwellings because they cannot afford to pay the rent for their own apartment. They usually use this strategy to avoid going to public and community housing, or sleeping rough (AIHW^a, 2013)

f) Education and employment: Understandably, given that poverty and unemployment are common experiences among virtually everyone who experiences

homelessness, unemployment is considered one of the major causes of homelessness. Calsyn and Morse (1991) found that a lack of education and poor employment histories were associated with chronic homelessness. Scitela et al. (2012) also found that shorter durations of homelessness was associated with current or recent employment and earned income, and those with poorer work stories (unemployed or outside of the labour force) remain longer in the condition of homeless.

The specialist services report shows that only 11% of all their clients (homeless and those at risk) were employed when requesting support for the first time, and 48% were out of the labour force. Of those clients that were employed, 59% were employed on a part-time basis. It is no surprise that 81% of their clients received some form of government payment when they start to receive support from the services (AIHW, 2013^b).

The last two individual factors usually associated by authors on homelessness are housing history and adverse events (Johnson et al., 2008), these will be addressed later in the paper, when the discussion on the impact that the price of housing and rent associated with shock events, can have on a person's life and its contribution to homelessness (O'Flaherty, 2009).

4.2. Structure

Structural factors are those that relate to the organization of society, such as conditions of employment and housing market, as well as public policies such as the health and social security (Scutella and Johnson, 2012). There are two trends that have been widely cited as responsible for the increase in the number of homeless people in recent decades: increased poverty and the reduction of housing with affordable rents (Shim et al., 1991; Scutella and Johnson, 2012).

a) Poverty from the 1980s, the levels of poverty in developed countries began to increase, especially in urban areas, where most of the homeless people live (Australian Council of Social Service [ACOSS], 2014). Some of the factors associated with increased poverty are the disappearance of employment opportunities for segments of the population (e.g. people over 50 years old, and in the manufacturing industry), and most insecure jobs which provide fewer benefits (casual

and part-time jobs), which occurs despite the global growth of wages, which has led to a growing gap between the richest and poorest (ACOSS, 2014). According to the ACOSS (2014) report on poverty in Australia, currently 2,265,000 people (12.8% of all people) live below the poverty line, including 575,000 children, 550,000 people (or 65% of all people on Newstart and Youth Allowance) have been unemployed for more than a year and 24% of Australians households experience housing stress.

Also, people with low educational and professional qualifications begin having difficulties in overcoming the poverty level. According to the ACOSS (2014) report on poverty, 15.9% of those living below the poverty line were employed part time and 4.7% employed full time. This reality has special significance for groups such as women, Indigenous people, and people born overseas, because these groups traditionally receive less money for their work, and the report also points to the plight of single parent families experiencing difficulties because their expenses leave little to support the family with just one income in the household.

This demonstrates that although work is an important part of the solution, alone employment will not be enough to ensure that people can avoid or exit homelessness. The high levels of the cost of housing associated with relatively low incomes and economic restraint can lead to people with work still ending up below the poverty line, and therefore structural measures will be necessary to address the situation (Burt, 2001).

b) Housing: parallel to the increase of poverty, many developed countries have seen in recent years the drastic decline in offers of low-cost housing, which has caused the increase in the number of homeless people, especially in cities (Curtis et al., 2013).

The housing market, as shown before, it is a major structural factor, O'Flaherty (1995) in his microeconomic theory of homelessness, states that high-priced housing markets lead landlords to disinvest in (or poorly maintain) low-priced rental units. Consumers at the lowest end of the income distribution, therefore, must choose between very low-quality housing at a certain price or homelessness. Shinn et al. (2001) compared the situation of the homeless with the game of musical chairs, in which poor people are the players and the houses chairs, where even when a property

is affordable it is simply not available; hundreds might apply for the one property and only one will get in, and with several losing the place (home) during game.

The sheer lack of stock at the lower end of the market has emerged as the one of the primary housing stress issues over the last decade. Moreover, this is not resolvable with traditional solutions, such as sharing a house with others or asking for financial help to family, or the temporary use of household savings. No individual or family may compensate for the pure housing shortage with simple adaptive measures. Structural measures are necessary to resolve the problem. Policies that facilitate families moving from renting to home-ownership counteract the tendency to put social housing at the fringe of cities increased transportation costs (Burke, 2011).

c) Also changes in the mental health system (referred to collectively but simplistically as deinstitutionalization), together with holes in the welfare "safety net" and a decline in the real value of welfare payments to various groups of people created more economic pressures that lead to relationship failure, and therefore plays a role in creating and exacerbating the homeless crisis (Christensen, 2003).

4.3. Integration: blending the agency and structure question

In developed countries the homeless question became a major issue during the 1990s, with the increase in people living in the streets of major cities. Social scientists began to question the models based on agency or structure (Scutella and Johnson, 2012). Both show some flaws, agency models could not explain why some people with drug or mental health problems or other 'personal problems' become homeless when others with similar issues do not. The structural approach, even if less connoted with moral positions, also raised questions, never having been able to respond convincingly as to why most poor people and most unemployed people do not become homeless, two major structural factors associated with homelessness.

As a way to integrate and blend some of the lessons from the agency and structure models some researchers focused their attention on explanations that look at the interactions between macro structures such as changes to the housing and labour markets, and the micro processes which render individuals vulnerable to homelessness (Scutella and Johnson, 2013). This approach has also been indicated as

the most efficient by the American Psychology Association [APA] (2010) when the Task Force on Homelessness issued a report recommending meaningful collaborations between psychologists and others working with the homeless and advocating for legislation that would fund housing and provide services to the homeless and those at risk of homelessness. As a result new integrative models appeared, two of them are the Economic Theory of Homelessness and Housing, developed by O'Flaherty (1995), and the Five Pathways into Homelessness from Chamberlain and Johnson (2011).

4.3.1. Economic Theory of Homeless and Housing

O' Flaherty presented for the first time his theory in 1995, in an attempt to explain the increase of homeless people in the USA since 1980. He presented a theory that homelessness was the sum of a permanent component—the average price and availability of housing—and a transitory component representing the vicissitudes of the moment (O'Flaherty, 2009^a, p. 2). He explains that the probability of someone becoming homeless happens when the permanent component is low, close to homelessness, and the transitory, the live shock events, is big. In cases where the permanent component is very close to homelessness, almost any negative shock will precipitate homelessness; reducing risks of the transitory component will make very little difference (O'Flaherty, 2009^a).

O'Flaherty also made a distinction between life shocks and causes/determinants, the former are a conjunction of bad circumstances that can hardly be predicted, sometimes just a matter of bad luck (e.g. natural disasters), and also hard to predict for how long people will remain in that situation. The latter are usually associated with causal relationship between an event and a consequence, it is therefore easy to predict (O'Flaherty, 2009^b, p. 5).

According to O'Flaherty (2009^a) income shocks appear to be the main event that leads to homelessness, and gentrification on urban areas does not appear to be an important source of shocks. Programs that stabilize income like social insurance and access to capital markets (for saving as well as borrowing) are thus likely to be more

effective in preventing homelessness than programs that aim to stabilize rents like rent control and anti-gentrification measures (O'Flaherty, 2009^a).

This line of research has been confirmed by other authors such as Curtis et al. (2013) when they confirmed the increased probability of a family experiencing a situation of homelessness when they live in a city with low availability of homes and high housing costs, and at the same time suffer a live shock, such as the illness of a children. It shows that homelessness results from a conjunction of adverse circumstances in which housing markets and individual characteristics collide.

4.3.2. The Five Pathways to Homelessness

Looking more closely to the work taking as reference the Australian context, Chamberlain and Johnson have highlighted the five most common pathways into homelessness. The pathways are called 'housing crisis', 'family breakdown', 'substance abuse', 'mental health' and 'youth to adult'. The authors mention that people experiencing homelessness, depending on the pathways, can remain homeless longer than others. The explanation they provide is because some of the paths are more influenced by individual factors and others are more dependable of structural factors (Chamberlain and Johnson, 2011)

Chamberlain and Johnson argue that the social adaptation theory, as discussed above, whereby individuals become long term homeless because they adapt to homelessness as a way of life, helps to explain what happens to people on the substance abuse and youth to adult pathways, but it does not readily explain what happens to people on the housing crisis, family breakdown and mental health pathways. People on these pathways bring with them different expectations, which shape how they make sense of their lives, and are under structural constraints that affect the duration of their homelessness (Chamberlain and Johnson, 2011).

The work by Chamberlain and Johnson emphasizes that a total distinction between individual factors (agency) and structural ones does not makes sense. This is so because both are essential to understanding the antecedents and the consequences of being homeless, and need to be considered in a systemic way, because, if the structural factors can create the conditions for homelessness,

individual factors may increase the vulnerability of individuals to them (Clapham, 2003).

5. Australian responses to homelessness

The phenomenon of homelessness is currently a social reality in sharp growth in large urban centres, whose diverse implications are unquestionable and deserving of special attention by social workers. It is important to note that it is not for lack of legal protection and legal frameworks that there are homeless people. The right to adequate housing, employment and access to health care and equal treatment before the law is universally proclaimed, as noted in particular Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948). In Australian society, at least since the 1980s, there is broad discussion surrounding the subject, with legislation and support programs in differing levels of involvement.

The first important step for a more comprehensive approach to the problem occurred in 1985, when the Commonwealth and State and Territory funding programs for homelessness were brought together, creating the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). This program aimed to provide crisis and transitional support and accommodation services to homeless people - as well as those at risk of homelessness - to help them achieve self-reliance. It was then agreed that the Australian Government had the responsibility for policy development; monitoring and evaluating accountability requirements associated with the program which the State and Territory governments administered on a day-to-day basis (Homelessness Taskforce, 2008).

The program was initially a response to the social concerns with the rising numbers of people living on the streets and women victims of domestic violence. At the time, a review of all existing programs recommended that all programs be integrated into a single, cost-shared initiative administered by the States and Territories. In its early stages, response to clients' needs was in the form of providing a safe environment with a bed for a night. Ultimately, the SAAP has provided services that meet the needs of their customers so that they could achieve a degree of self-sufficiency and independence. The program was designed to be evaluated every

five years and ended in 2008, being replaced by the program created by the government of Kevin Rudd called 'The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness (Homelessness Taskforce, 2008).

The new program came as a response to the public consultation process held during May and June 2008 (Homelessness Taskforce, 2008). Public feedback clearly demonstrated that homelessness had so many factors associated with it, that there was demand for an even more comprehensive response to make a real impact on reducing homelessness (Australian Government Department of Social Services, 2014).

The government decided that a new program should be built based on:

- Demonstrating national leadership;
- Focusing strongly on prevention and early intervention to stop people becoming homeless;
- Providing support for homeless Australians that leads to increased economic and social participation;
- Encouraging closer collaboration between homeless and mainstream services used by people vulnerable to homelessness;
- Increasing access to safe affordable housing linked to appropriate support services;
- Recognising the complexity of homelessness and addressing the needs of different groups within the homeless population including families with children, young people, Indigenous people, older adults, people with mental health and/or drug and substance abuse issues, and women and children experiencing domestic or family violence.

The ambitious goals of the program by 2020 were to:

- Halve overall homelessness;
- Offer supported accommodation to all rough sleepers who require it

(Homelessness Taskforce, 2008).

Another signal of the strong commitment from the country to reduce homelessness in Australia is seen in the National Partnership Agreements, developed and funded by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). This included The National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, The National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA), National Partnership Agreement on Social Housing, and the

National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing. According to the COAG (2012), The National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness was a comprehensive plan to significantly reduce homelessness by 2013. The National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness provided \$1.1 billion of Commonwealth, State and Territory resourcing over the initial four years, helping to fund new social housing dwellings and specialist homelessness projects across the country. In March 2014, the NPAH was extended for one more year, with the allocation of more than \$115m, with the Government promising to work with State and Territory governments on future funding arrangements (Harris, 2014).

The agreement defined key groups: rough sleepers, people experiencing homelessness more than once, people escaping violence (especially women and children), children and young people including those subjected to or exiting care and protection, Indigenous people and people exiting social housing, institutional care such as health, mental health, juvenile justice, or adult prisons (COAG, 2012).

One group that was not considered a priority at the time was those who became homeless because they were under severe financial stress due to the incapacity to keep up with the increase in the price of rents. This group was initially included in the social housing and remote Indigenous housing programs, but its importance was apparently diminished (COAG, 2012). This group became categorised as an at-risk group, rather than an actual homeless group with serious consequences for them. For the homeless, they were kept in a position of disadvantage when searching for help after becoming homelessness.

The few who mention this issue in the initial Homelessness Agreement never specify measures to tackle it, and it is interesting to notice that even among the specialist services, the idea of including the group as a priority group suffered some resistance. This could be seen when Homelessness Australia (2012) made a report with the evaluation of Australian Government's White Paper on Homelessness. They contested the inclusion of a measure to build 50,000 affordable rental homes for low and moderate income earners in the program, because for them, that was a scheme to benefit low and moderate incomes earners, and "*...not a homelessness initiative and should not be promoted as one*" (Homelessness Australia, 2012, p. 20). This explains why the measure was only graded with a 4/10.

But either way the synergies created with the agreement allowed the State and Territories to create their own programs adjusted to their individual needs.

6. Western Australia homelessness characterization

With respect to Western Australia, and using the ABS (^a 2012) and the AIHW (^a 2013) as sources of information, it can be said that in WA represents a slightly different picture from the rest of Australia. In recent years the number has not suffered major alterations; in 2013 there were 9595 homeless, and 7070 at risk of becoming homeless. The rate per 10,000 in the WA's population is smaller when compared to the national rate: 42.8 and 48.9 respectively (ABS ^a, 2012).

If only considering the Greater Perth area, on Census night 2011, there was an estimated 4,902 people experiencing homelessness. The areas covered in Greater Perth include Mandurah and Serpentine- Jarrahdale regions. There are some similarities and differences when comparing WA and Australia as a whole. For example, in the national figures, the majority of the homeless population are male (56%), born in Australia, living in overcrowding dwellings (43%), and become homeless because of domestic violence or relationship issues (34%), followed by financial difficulties (28%) and accommodation issues (19%) (AIHW ^a, 2013). On the other hand, there are some differences. For example, in WA, people preferably stay with others, referred to couch surfing, than going to supported accommodations for homeless people or boarding houses (ABS ^a, 2012). Also the numbers of rough sleepers are higher in WA when compared with Australia (ABS ^a, 2012).

Most of the increase in homelessness between 2006 and 2011 was reflected in people living in severely crowded dwellings, which could reflect a decrease in housing affordability (ABS ^a, 2012). Indeed low and moderate income earners in Perth are struggling to afford private rental accommodation (Community Housing Coalition of WA [CHCWA], 2012). The Median Weekly Rent in Perth Metropolitan area in 2012 was \$450, an increase of almost 180% since 2002. In the same period the average weekly income increased by only 71 per cent and the WA adult minimum wage increased by just 40 per cent (CHCWA, 2012). The increase in the prices of the private rental market happened during the last decade, when WA has

experienced strong economic growth (Government of Western Australia Department of Treasury, 2014). The real economic growth in Western Australia out-paced the rest of the nation, growing on average by 4.9% per annum compared to 3.0% per annum nationally, driven by the mining and petroleum sector which represents more than 30% of the state economy (Government of Western Australia Department of Treasury, 2014). Yet, this growth has come with significant cost, especially for people with low and moderate incomes.

7. Western Australia responses to homelessness

The State Government assists people experiencing homelessness or those at risk of becoming homeless, through direct service provision and by contracting and funding non-government agencies to provide services to the homeless. Following the guidelines from the Commonwealth/State National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) and the Commonwealth/State National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH), the state decided to build an integrated homelessness service system.

The State Government intervention on housing was called the Affordable Housing Strategy 2010-2020 - Opening Doors to Affordable Housing. The aim for the program is to help and assist people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, to achieve sustainable housing and social inclusion. This will be achieved through assisting people who are homeless to secure and sustain their tenancies and to assist in moving from crisis accommodation or primary homelessness, to sustainable accommodation (WA Government Department of Housing, 2010).

Under the program, it is projected that the State Government will fund 20,000 new affordable houses by 2020. These houses will be available through the building of new social housing for people with very low incomes, providing affordable lots of land below the median price, building and renting new dwellings under the National Rental Affordability Scheme, helping low to moderate income households who might not otherwise access finance to buy their first house, and in some cases building houses in partnership with the private sector (WA Government Department of Housing, 2010). This approach, driven primarily from an economic perspective, is a

change from the traditional role of the Department of Housing; from builder and manager of public housing to a market facilitator in partnership with the private and the not-for-profit sectors, (WA Government Department of Housing, 2010).

In addition to the Affordable Housing Strategy 2010-2020, for those on low and moderate incomes, the State Government also assists through direct service provision and by contracting and funding non-government agencies to provide services to the homeless and to those at risk of homelessness (WA Government Department of Child Protection, 2010). In 2010, the State Government presented the state plan to address homelessness with the Opening Doors program, in which the State Government made an initial investment of \$68 million over four years to provide a comprehensive range of facilities and programs to improve and expand existing homelessness services (WA Government Department of Child Protection, 2010). The plan emerged from the Western Australian Council on Homelessness, which works as an external advisory body to the government on matters relating to homelessness, (Department of Child Protection WA, 2010). It intends to maintain an integrative approach, with strong participation of community organisations, providing a range of interventions from early intervention and prevention, to measures that break the cycle of homelessness.

According to the Department of Child Protection WA (2013), in their evaluation report on the Western Australian programs implemented under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, between 2011 and 2012 there were 14 programs provided by 41 non-government agencies, delivering 81 services, with the Mobile Clinical Outreach Team (MCOT) that is funded by NPAH, but staffed directly through the Health Department (Russel, 2012).

Some of the agencies are nationwide operators, like the Salvation Army, Anglicare, Red Cross, or Mission Australia, that run local programs. Others are not-for-profit community organisations, such as St. Bartholomew, or local government agencies like the Drug & Alcohol Youth Service operating as a network under the coordination of the Department for Child Protection and Family Support.

8. The impact of the lack of affordable housing in Perth Metropolitan Area

Homelessness is something that happens to some people for periods of their lives. It is not an indelible characteristic. Most homeless spells are like semesters rather than careers, and these spells are largely unpredictable. Almost everyone who is homeless today will be housed in two years from now, and were led to their situation through adverse life events or circumstances. Often, a single, additional pressure or event – job loss, eviction, poor health or relationship breakdown – can further a person who is already vulnerable, into homelessness. People without support networks, skills or personal resilience, or those who have limited work capacity due to their age or disability, can quickly become homeless. Sometimes the situation is a direct result of individual choice, sometimes it is not, it is simply a matter of what O’Flaherty calls “bad luck” - random events that are hard to predict (O’Flaherty, 2009). For O’Flaherty, the two major factors that contribute to homelessness are income volatility and housing conditions.

When looking at the homelessness situation in the metropolitan area of Perth, it is inevitable that these two factors are considered in explaining how the economic boom did not solve or mitigate the problem of homelessness, but rather exacerbated it. According to the ACOSS (2014) report on poverty, usually the risk of poverty is greater outside capital cities in most states and territories (especially in Queensland and Tasmania), in part due to higher unemployment in regional Australia. The exceptions are New South Wales and Western Australia, where very high housing costs in the capital cities have increased the risk of poverty (ACOSS, 2014). In addition, a lack of money produces feelings of anguish and despair in the population, which has a preventative effect on allowing people to improve their situation. They need sufficient income to enable them to have adequate and decent shelter, food and clothing and to meet other expenses that are required. Kirkman et al. (2014) in a study on single mothers with kids, explains how insufficient money works as a pathway to homelessness, usually after a family breakdown, affecting their mental and physical well-being, as well as their social networks, resulting in greater difficulty to achieve a desired reality again.

Chamberlain and Johnson (2011) also noted that people experiencing financial crisis can be precipitated into homelessness. Low-income households often experience financial hardship and must decide which bills are a priority to pay. They present the typical case of Andrea: she had to pay all of the bills, she had no food and there was not enough money to pay for everything. Therefore, she started getting behind on her rent payments, until she was evicted with her children, because the landlord had plans to sell the house and did not want to wait any longer. Unfortunately, the humiliation, deprivation and depth of despair some people feel is too often either unknown or forgotten in public stories and discourse about people living on welfare benefits (ACOSS, 2014).

The current policy arena emphasizes the ideals of mutual obligation. The Australian model of Mutual Obligation is based on the assumption that income support recipients need to be taught how to be more 'self-reliant', to 'participate' in society more fully and to become 'active' rather than 'passive' citizens (Parker and Fopp, 2004). The model represents a shift from a system of entitlement to one of increased obligation (Moss, 2006), and is moving into an agency model, whereby poverty and homelessness are perceived as a lack of enterprise; a moral failing.

As a result, many of those who receive financial assistance see their income reduced by cuts, and the situation for those who lose their job, fall ill, have a disability, separate from their partner, or retire, can become problematic because the safety net that the welfare state was supposed to provide, is now not enough. This is shown in the ACCOSS (2014) report, where it can be seen that 40% of people relying on social security payments lived below the poverty line (50% of median income), and 2.55 million people (13.9% of all people) in Australia, were living below the poverty line (ACOSS, 2014). Accordingly, 233,603 of these were in Western Australia, and the majority were in the Perth Metropolitan Area. Numbers are influenced mainly by housing costs, showing that, in many cases, having paid work is not enough to protect people from poverty. It also may be argued that the relationship between low income and housing costs is negative; usually those with less income have higher housing costs, because they usually do not own their home and thus, need to pay rent or a mortgage, (ACOSS, 2014).

The lack of housing in the housing market creates a scenario whereby those who are most vulnerable - households on low and moderate incomes – face greater housing stress. This is due to the impact that high housing costs has on expenditure, including essential needs or unexpected expenses, therefore putting them at risk of homelessness. In Western Australia, this shortage is recognised by all from the local government to many homelessness specialist agencies in their reports (Shelter WA 2012; Department of Housing 2010). They acknowledge this is a factor responsible for pushing more people into homeless conditions (Burk, 2011).

Indeed, there was a significant increase in the cost of private rental accommodation in Perth between 2002 and 2012, without a proportional increase in the lower and medium wages in the same period (Community Housing Coalition of WA, 2012). From June 2003 to June 2012, Perth median rent surged 174%. In comparison, the WA average weekly income increased by only 71% and the WA adult minimum wage increased by just 40%. In May 2012 only 0.5% of the rentals listed on the REIWA website were affordable for people earning the minimum wage, (Community Housing Coalition of WA, 2012). This is arguably due to several factors including population growth - an increase of 207,139 inhabitants between 2008 and 2012 (ABS, 2014); fewer available rentals, the vacancy rate of rental accommodation in Perth passed from 4.7% in 2009 to 1.8% in 2012; high house prices with a rise in the median price of the Metropolitan Area of Perth house sale of 65,000 AUD between 2009 and 2013 (REIWA, 2014); economic and lifestyle reasons, potential buyers preferring to wait for the market to slow down remain longer in rental habitations, sometimes in areas that are much less than they could afford. Therefore, the less favourable, cheaper locations are unavailable for those with lower less income.

For many people, the public housing system could be a way out of homelessness; with the price of rents adjusted to their income, this gives them the opportunity to break the cycle of homelessness, and in time enables people to reenter the private market. Unfortunately, there are currently 23,000 people on WA's housing waiting lists (The Greens, 2014) and this has doubled since 2007, with an average waiting time in central, south and north regions of Metropolitan Perth of

more than 10 years long, and in Fremantle, Kwinana and Peel of 4-7 years (The Greens, 2014).

All these factors help explain how the market is pushing so many families into situations of homelessness or risk of homelessness. This is shown in the increased number of people living in severely crowded dwellings and caravan parks, and why more families were searching for support from homeless specialist agencies between 2012 and 2013 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2013). They do not necessarily have the same issues traditionally associated with homelessness: unemployment, family and relationship breakdown, domestic and family violence, mental illness, disability and addiction. Rather, in many cases they have jobs but their earning capacity is not enough to maintain or access housing. The concern with this new group of homeless is shared by Andrew Hall, Anglicare WA's General Manager of Social Inclusion, and Victor Crevatin, Director of Homelessness and Housing Services at St. Patrick's Community Support Centre in Fremantle. Both deal with an increased number of people who do not fit the traditional image of homelessness; those who live on the streets, try to hold down a job, and send their kids to school after sleeping in their car all night (Community Housing Coalition of WA , 2012).

9. Recommendations

The current situation of homelessness is slowly changing, and there is an increasing number of homes becoming available on the housing market, with the introduction of 15,900 new affordable homes under the umbrella of the Affordable Housing Strategy 2010-2020 - Opening Doors to Affordable Housing (WA Government Department of Housing, 2014). Additionally, the economy is slowing down; in WA, the estimated growth of 2.75% in the 2014-2015 financial year is significantly below the 5.1% recorded in 2012-2013. A likely consequence of this is that less people are looking for job opportunities, reflecting an ease on the population growth which is expected to remain constant for the next four years (WA Government Department of Treasury, 2014).

These indicators reflect some relief on the housing market, as shown by the decrease of 15,000 AUD in the median house price since 2013, the decline of 12% in

average and median prices of rent in Perth from 2013, and the actual vacancy rate of all rental properties of 4% in the metropolitan area of Perth (REIWA.COM, 2014). The housing market is showing an increase in availability of houses within the last year, however this does not necessarily mean that housing is becoming occupied by those who need it most; those with less resources.

According to the Anglicare Australia Rental Affordability Snapshot (2014), a total of 6,975 rental houses listed on Realestate.com and Gumtree in the metropolitan area; an increase of 63% when compared with the numbers from 2013. Even with a decrease in prices due to the increase in supply, often prices are still not low enough to make them affordable for low income households. Overall, the situation remains difficult for low income households, especially when an affordable rental is 30% or less of the total income of the household (Anglicare 2014). The Affordability Snapshot report shows that there are few affordable properties in Perth for single people on Newstart or Youth Allowance, and only one for aged pension couples. Singles and single income families have limited options with 95 properties affordable for them, whilst families on a dual minimum wage were slightly better off with 176 properties being affordable (Anglicare 2014).

It is obvious that more needs to be done to introduce properties for low income households, especially when the economic forecast expects a new boost on the WA's economy in 2016-2017 (WA Department of Treasury, 2014 b) and the implication that this poses to population growth and consequent pressure on the housing market. Using existing literature, there are some measures which could help alleviate this problem in the future.

9.1. Reduce volatility of the income

O'Flaherty (2009) considers the housing market (the permanent component) and the income (the transitory component) as the main two shocks that precipitate homelessness. She explains that homelessness can be reduced either by raising the permanent component or reducing the variance of the transitory component. She posits that most of the attention has been placed on the permanent component through policies that provide subsidised housing, and defends that this may have a

paradoxical effect because people with rental support tend to remain for longer in the same property which reduces the number of available houses on the market (O’Flaherty, 2009).

O’Flaherty defends the implementation of the policies that reduce volatility of the income and claims they are more effective, because this would enable people to deal with unexpected events that might lead them to homelessness (O’Flaherty, 2009).

There are two reflections on this perspective:

- It is counter cyclical with current policies on social security;
- It is supported by the Anglicare report (2014) stating that the first obvious conclusion is the need to raise the amount of money that people receive on benefits or pensions in order for them to have access to housing and remain in the housing market.

This perspective of the importance of raising the lower income level, especially for people on benefits and pensions, is also shared by ACOSS (2014) on their report on poverty in Australia. From the findings of Yates, Randolph and Halloway (2006) when they explored the concern that high housing costs in central city regions of Australia were excluding many lower paid workers from jobs in those regions, found that affordability problems were driven primarily by low incomes, rather than lack of housing availability or occupation.

Further research focuses on finding ways to increase the stock of available houses for low income households, and ways to prevent them becoming victims of evictions and homelessness

9.2. Community housing

Gilmour (2013) supports the sustainable development of affordable housing, claiming it has a positive impact on decreasing the waiting list of public housing for low income households. He claims sustainable development could be more easily achieved if the WA Government recognises the potential of the community sector, along with the public housing sector provided by State Housing Authorities, to increase the stock of social housing (Gilmour, 2013).

In recognising the merits of the WA Department of Housing, Gilmour recommended 26 proposals for the sector. The key recommendations are: deepen partnership amongst the stakeholders; more open and transparency from the government, with separation from fund, policy and regulation tasks; more concern on outcomes and less on bureaucracy; regulation for the housing providers, promoting sector consolidation with concerns around the sustainability of the providers, with a review of the Opening Doors policy objectives, and enable the sector to grow to over 12,000 properties by 2020; and the State Department of Housing should recline from their role as property developer and leave that to the private, social and community sectors (Gilmour, 2013, pp; 3-4).

The ideas of Gilmour are in accordance with what is presented by the Community Housing Coalition of WA (Community Housing Coalition of WA, 2013; Doyle, 2013). Community Land Trust (CLT) is one example of a community housing program that could have a significant impact on the group of people at risk of, or already experiencing a situation of homelessness due to situations of financial stress.

CLTs are a form of common land ownership where land is usually held by a private non-profit organisation and leased on a long term basis to members of the community or other organisations (Crabtree et al., 2012). This arrangement can offer the widely acknowledged benefits of home ownership, including resident control over a dwelling, security of tenure and transfer of occupancy rights, and the potential for asset wealth building (Crabtree et al., 2012). Contracts can be inherited or sold for a price previously established in the initial contract, however, the land lease requires that the home be either sold back to the CLT or to another low income household. They are an alternative to unaffordable market mortgages and traditional social housing. Currently there are some examples of CLT under exploration by community organisations in Western Australia (Crabtree et al., 2012).

9.3. Integrated allocation system

Wiesel et al. (2013) suggest an integrated allocation system for struggling households to apply for social housing at times of crisis. In many cases applicants that do not fit the traditional target groups and, due to an under appreciation of their

case, can become lost in the service bureaucracy. With this system, the applicants could apply for public and community housing at the same time and in a single application, with social services or with an external organisation. The authors also suggest a choice-based approach, where they can bid for the most suitable accommodations without being penalised for refusing others (Wiesel et al., 2013). Finally, they recommend that transfer options for social housing tenants whose housing needs have changed over time should be taken into consideration, and in all cases should not be penalised and therefore should keep their place on the waiting lists (Wiesel et al., 2013). This would require expanding the eligibility criteria, but would bring more flexibility to the services and proper matching of housing for tenants. Similar designs of integrated systems are already being used on the One Social Housing System in Queensland and in the Housing Pathways Program in New South Wales (Wiesel et al., 2013).

9.4. Improve the existing prevention program

Increasing the effectiveness and accessibility of services is very important, as well as early intervention in preventing a person from entering a situation of homelessness. Homelessness is sometimes extremely difficult to avoid, due to the high number of factors that could start a crisis. Culhane et al. (2011) recognise these difficulties and conducted a literature review which explores some successful prevention-oriented approaches to homelessness in the United States and Europe. They presented what they recognise is an almost ideal model, but one that is hard to be implemented totally in any country. However, there are some key ideas that are important to mention:

- In a prevention-oriented system, traditional forms of shelter or transitional housing would not necessarily go away, but they would be embedded in a larger and more proactive housing stabilisation-focused network (Culhane et al., 2011).
- Homelessness assistance should not be merely a promise of services that only a person who remains homeless, benefits from; rather, the homelessness assistance system should help people to resolve their crises, access ongoing sources

of support in the community, and provide a basic safety net assistance such as emergency shelter and temporary rental assistance as needed (Culhane et al., 2011)

- Success will require human and financial resources for direct assistance designed to keep at-risk individuals and families from becoming homeless, and to move homeless households into housing and other permanent living situations as quickly as possible (Culhane et al., 2011).

- It is essential to create a broader connection to the mainstream community-based systems. Homelessness services can and should help to identify homeless situations and to screen cases, but cannot be a place where all solutions are provided. If some of these service providers have problems, it is difficult for them to be effective. A new prevention-oriented system will result in making mainstream system reforms part of the solution (Culhane et al., 2011).

- Interventions to sustain housing stability and support for people after leaving homelessness are aimed to prevent a reoccurrence of homelessness (Culhane et al., 2011).

According to Culhane et al. (2011), these are the factors presented in successful prevention programs in the United States and Europe, and it could help to make the Opening Doors program even more efficient. It is surprising to notice an absence of any specific suggestions of interventions that sustain housing stability and support for those preventing a reoccurrence of homelessness. From an economic perspective, early intervention is particularly crucial; the later the intervention, the higher the costs associated with housing but also with health and legal issues.

10. Conclusion

Homelessness is an important part of social exclusion; it is hard for someone who is homeless to become employed or retain their job, be enrolled in education and training, and maintain good health, including sound mental health. In 2013, around 244,000 Australians accessed specialist homeless services around the country. 16,665 of those were in Western Australia, of which 7,070 were already experiencing a situation of homelessness when they accessed help (Homelessness Australia, 2013).

If traditional causes are still the main contributor to homelessness, such as domestic violence, family breakup or problems of substance abuse, a new group of homeless has emerged with different causes.

In many cases this group does not have the typical issues associated with homeless people; they still maintain their jobs and are living with the family in overcrowded dwellings, in caravan parks or even in their car. Their main problem is their low income, which forces them out of the housing market, particularly when an unexpected event happens in their life, for example sick children, loss of a loved one or loss of employment. In some ways, they are double victims; victims of the high price of housing, which exacerbates the effects of a life shock on the homeless, and victims of a lack of support by homelessness services.

Interestingly, a report from the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute [AHURI] Homelessness Research Conference (2012) reveals that the chronically homeless (those who remain homeless for lengthy periods, or without any interval) represent a small proportion of the homeless population, however they are disproportionately high users of homelessness services and resources (including prisons, shelters, hospitals). Unfortunately, shelters are used for long term homelessness, rather than for crisis accommodation for which they were intended.

This group of people with low and medium income, is especially prominent in the metropolitan area of Perth, due to high housing market prices as a consequence of the economic growth and population boom in recent years. In many cases, a highly priced housing market leads landlords to disinvest in, or poorly maintain, low-priced rental units. Consumers at the lowest end of the income distribution therefore, must choose between very low-quality housing at a certain price or homelessness. This is happening in Perth, where people must choose between moving to cheaper suburbs or become homeless because they cannot afford to pay the rent. With the economy slowing down, especially the mining sector in the last year, and the introduction of new accommodation in the market as a consequence of the Affordable Housing Strategy 2010-2020, the prices are reducing, but not enough. This is shown in the Housing Snapshot report conducted by Anglicare (2014), with reduced numbers of houses available with a suitable rent (less than 30% of total income) for low incomes, including workers on the minimum wage.

These people may need better assistance from homelessness services, including state services and non-profit organisations. With an allowance greater than the cost of rent, they would benefit from an increase in their income which would give them the necessary security to avoid falling into homelessness when faced with a shock, (O’Flaherty, 2012). A stronger partnership between the state government and community housing organisations, better coordination from the services, and efficient prevention programs would also be important to help the homeless, especially with the WA Department of Treasury’s forecast for a new economic boom in 2017, and all the associated consequences for the housing market.

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